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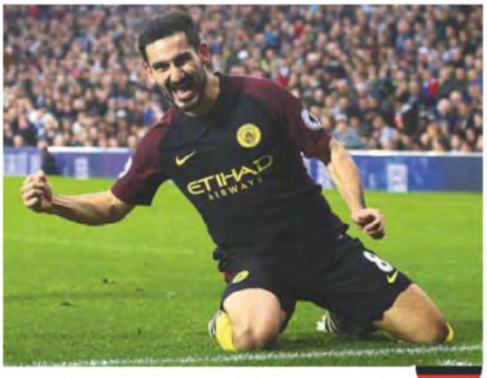
Contents

FEATURES



32 Player biography
Ilkay Gundogan

38 Stories for 2017
Football's upcoming big events

54 African Nations Cup preview
Gabon 2017

THE WORLD THIS MONTH

People in the news...on and off the pitch

4 **In pictures**
10 **From the Editor**
16 **ESM XI**
17 **Ins & Outs** people on the move
18 **Brian Glanville** the problem with Pep

EYEWITNESS

20 **Brazil** Chapecoense team in fatal air crash
24 **Colombia** Sudamericana and Club World Cup
26 **Spain** Sergio Ramos and Real's new club record
30 **Trinidad & Tobago** Hart problems for Warriors

FACE TO FACE

62 **Hugo Broos**

6 OF THE BEST

66 **Super subs**

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

68 **African Nations Cup**

TALENT SCOUT

70 **Strikers**

ARCHIVES

72 **January 1972**

THE GREAT MATCHES

98 **England v Portugal, 1966**

18

70

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See page 8

World Service

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88

76 **Club World Cup** report from Japan
78 **Champions League** Arsenal draw Bayern
80 **Europa League** into the knockout stage
82 **Brazil** Palmeiras return to winning ways
87 **USA** Seattle claim a first MLS Cup
87 **Zimbabwe** Recruiting in the UK
88 **Japan** Antlers are crowned champs
90 **CONCACAF** *Ticos* on track for Russia

PLUS 86 Global diary 92 South American league reviews 94 Results, tables, fixtures

In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

BRAZIL...the Chapecoense players who did not travel on the tragic flight to Colombia mourn their team-mates during a tribute to the crash victims at their home stadium

ENGLAND...the studs of West Ham United keeper Adrian meet with the knee of Manchester United's Zlatan Ibrahimovic

ARGENTINA...Boca Juniors' Carlos Tevez is embraced by team-mates after scoring his team's second goal in the *Superclasico* win away to River Plate

SPAIN...(from left) Real Madrid's Raphael Varane, Casemiro and Sergio Ramos out-jump their Borussia Dortmund opponents

COLOMBIA...America de Cali players pray after beating Deportes Quindio 2-1 to return to the top flight after an absence of five years

PORTUGAL...a Porto fan stirs up the crowd during a Champions League match against Leicester City

INDIA... Mumbai defender Gerson Vieira comes under pressure from Atletico de Kolkata players

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FROM THE EDITOR

Shoma Doi is not a name with which many people will be familiar. But the Japanese midfielder is worth remembering as a pub-quiz trivia question for the future as he was the player who converted the first-ever penalty awarded as a result of video technology. Hungarian referee Viktor Kassai (another name worth remembering) took the decision to award Kashima Antlers the spot-kick after reviewing video footage in the Club World Cup semi-final (page 76).

Rightly or wrongly, the Club World Cup does not receive extensive global coverage. Even in South America, where traditionally the competition is taken most seriously, interest was lower than normal following Atletico Nacional's failure to reach the Final.

> For better or worse, the Video Assistant Referee system will play an increasing role in football

Similarly, the progress of host team Kashima, at the expense of continental champions from Africa and South America, did little to boost the Club World Cup's credibility.

Nevertheless, the games from this season's tournament will be analysed over the coming weeks and months for evidence of the strengths and weakness of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system. It's a story that will develop as VAR, for better or worse, plays an increasing role in football.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Football unites to mourn Chapecoense side killed in a plane crash p20
2 Atletico Nacional concede the Sudamericana Cup p24
3 Club World Cup p76
4 Palmeiras win the Brazilian championship p82
5 The African Nations Cup kicks off in Gabon p54
6 Kashima Antlers win Japan's J.League p88
7 Arsenal draw Bayern Munich in the Champions League knockout stage p78
8 Zenit, Shakhtar and Schalke star in the Europa League p80
9 Seattle Sounders win their first MLS title p84
10 Fans pay their respects to 44 killed in Besiktas stadium bombing p10

United...Turkish fans pay tribute

TURKEY

Fans and players pay tribute to 44 killed in Besiktas stadium bombing

Thousands of rival fans came together to pay their respects to the 44 people – mostly police officers – killed in a terrorist attack outside Besiktas stadium in Istanbul.

Hours after a match between Besiktas and Bursaspor, a twin bomb attack targeted police at the Vodafone Arena. A car bomb hit a police vehicle and a suicide bomber detonated a device shortly afterwards. The death toll rose to 44 in the days following the attack.

Crowds arriving to watch Besiktas' first home

"As the plane lost height there was only silence"

Brazilian radio journalist Rafael Henzel, one of the six survivors of the Chapecoense air crash

Respect...Besiktas' Olcay Sahan with police officers

game since the tragedy left flowers, including red and white carnations – the colours of the national flag – outside the stadium, along with scarves from numerous Turkish teams.

In their first game following the bombing, Trabzonspor's players took to the pitch wearing police berets in memory.

The day after the bombing, Galatasaray's Yasin Oztekin celebrated his goal against Gaziantepspor by rushing over to the corner of the pitch and embracing several of the police officers on duty.

Sports newspaper *Fanatik*, European Sports Media's partner in Turkey, donated the profits of a day's edition to the families of the victims.

HEROES & VILLAINS

ANDY WOODWARD

Brave...Andy Woodward

Former Crewe Alexandra defender who waived his right to anonymity and revealed that he had been sexually abused by a football coach as a child, an action that lead to more than 350 people alleging that they too were victims, with 98 English clubs linked to the allegations.

ORLANDO CITY

In a tribute to the 49 people killed in June's shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, the MLS club have installed seats in their new stadium which are designed in the Rainbow flag to represent the LGBT community.

ATLETICO NACIONAL

The Colombian club asked for Chapecoense to be awarded the Sudamericana Cup following the plane crash that killed 71 people, including 19 of the Brazilian side's players and staff.

ENZO ZIDANE

The son of Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane scored within 18 minutes of appearing as a substitute on his debut for the club in their 6-1 Spanish Cup win against Cultural Leonesa.

Lift...Enzo Zidane celebrates scoring on his debut

METZ FANS

A Metz supporter threw a firecracker onto the pitch that struck Lyon keeper Anthony Lopes, forcing the game to be abandoned. While he was receiving treatment, another firecracker exploded just inches away from him. Lopes was taken to hospital and, after a 45-minute break in play, the game was eventually abandoned.

Flashpoint...Anthony Lopes receives treatment

JERMAINE BECKFORD & EOIN DOYLE

The Preston North End team-mates were sent off for fighting with each other in the closing stages of their side's English second-tier game at Sheffield Wednesday.

SERGIO AGUERO & FERNANDINHO

The Manchester City pair were handed four- and three-match suspensions respectively, after both were sent off late in the Premier League game against Chelsea. Aguero was dismissed for a reckless foul on David Luiz and Fernandinho pushed Cesc Fabregas in the ensuing melee.

Push...Fernandinho raises his arm to Cesc Fabregas

MARCO POLO DEL NIDO

The Brazil FA president had been expected to travel to the Sudamericana Cup Final with Chapecoense but is believed to have been reluctant to leave his homeland for fear of arrest in the ongoing FIFAgate scandal.

"It's a well-known brand. But we have two teams in New York and will not have a third"

MLS commissioner Don Garber rules out any possibility of New York Cosmos being admitted to the league

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to http://po.st/XoeiL1

1 MASULUKE OSCARINE
Baroka v Orlando Pirates
The goalkeeper makes his way upfield as Baroka are awarded a corner in the fifth minute of added time and proceeds to score a spectacular overhead kick and earn his team a 1-1 draw in the South African league.

2 FELIPE GALLEGOS
Necaxa v America
Exchanges passes with Jesus Isijara, who chips a superb ball over the America defence which he then dinks past the keeper.

3 JUAN CAZERES
Atletico Mineiro v Gremio
A stunning strike from his own half in the Brazilian Cup Final.

4 KALIFA COULIBALY
Gent v Konyaspor
Traps the ball on his chest before turning and shooting low into the corner from the edge of the penalty area.

5 MANU TRIGUEROS
Villarreal v Steaua Bucharest
Produces an outrageous chip over the goalkeeper that drops in off the underside of the crossbar.

6 CARLOS TEVEZ
Boca Juniors v River Plate
Curls a first-time shot into the top corner from the edge of the penalty area in the *Superclasico*.

WINNERS

BORUSSIA DORTMUND
The German club scored 21 goals in their six games to set a new record for the Champions League group stage.

OMAR ABDULRAHMAN
The Al Ain & United Arab Emirates midfielder was named Asian Footballer of the Year by the AFC.

RIYAD MAHREZ
The 25-year-old Leicester City and Algeria midfielder was voted BBC African Player of the Year for the first time in his career.

LOSERS

BENFICA
The Portuguese club's unbeaten run of 23 games came to an end with a 2-1 loss to Maritimo.

ATLETICO MADRID
Suffered a third defeat in five games to slip 12 points behind La Liga leaders Real Madrid.

TONY PULIS
The West Brom boss had to pay £3.7m damages to Crystal Palace over the way he left the club at the start of the 2014-15 season.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Time to stop the 10 v 11 nonsense

Sent off....a red card for Andrea Ranocchia in the Europa League also punishes his team, Internazionale

If you'd just shelled out £1,000 for a ringside seat at a title fight, how would you feel if your man was found guilty of a low punch in the second round and forced to continue the fight with one of his arms strapped to his side?

Obviously boxing would never allow such a preposterous rule, yet this is, in effect, what football does regularly when a player is red-carded, as the rules demand that his team must soldier on with only 10 players.

And that makes as much sense as a one-armed boxer. Particularly if the punishment comes early. Suddenly, the contest is fatally distorted as 11 versus 10 is no longer a fair game. Chances are quite high that the short-sided team – and who could blame them – will turn stolidly defensive.

Is that what fans pay to see? Is it what the millions of TV viewers want? Is it what sport's leaders want? Is it what the sport itself needs?

The answer to all the questions is surely a resounding "No".

So why do we put up with it? Surely it should not be beyond the sport's legislators to come up with a punishment for the individual, but one that doesn't ruin the entire game.

I have broached this topic before in this column, in a rather tentative way. That was 12 years ago. I didn't like ejections then and I like them even less now. So, no more pussy-footing around: football has to stop this 10 v 11 nonsense.

I start with an insistence that the ejected player must be replaced, to keep the game at 11 v 11; which, I realise, means considerably weakening the effect of the red card. To compensate for that, I'm proposing that all red cards, wherever on the field they are given, must involve not only an ejection but a penalty kick against the offending team.

So, when the dust settles, the guilty team will have had a goal scored against it – well, usually, although penalties are saved or missed from time to time – but it will still have 11 players on the field. And the game can continue as a real contest and not a drawn-out march to the scaffold for the short-sided team.

And there you have it, a straightforward solution to the problem of distorted games, a problem caused by the game's own rules.

But changing anything in football is never simple. There are a lot of modifications to be considered. Starting with the most perverse.

I have found, to my great surprise, there are soccer devotees who find nothing wrong with 10 v 11 games. They point out that sometimes the 10 men win, and how about that for excitement? I have no satisfactory answer to that; it's the same argument that insists 0-0 draws are exciting. They might be, but mostly they are anything but. Yet football apparently prefers to put up with a lot of dross for the sake of something that only happens occasionally. That's the first option. Do nothing. A football tradition, I fear.

Beyond the irritating perversity lie some objections which make sense and threaten my well-ordered rule change. Should there not be a gradation in the severity of punishment? For instance, should a two-yellow ejection be treated as harshly as a straight red? Or this, which I think is reasonable: a team can replace an ejected player only once – when it gets its first red card, and any more red cards and we're back to the 10-man scenario.

Another reasonable suggestion is that the replacement rule would apply only in the first half. Or maybe it would make sense to ban any further subs for a team that has used a replacement player.

I don't think any of those moves could be described as Draconian, but they would all help to decrease the likelihood of 10 v 11 games. Two big unknowns remain: the reaction of the coaches, who would immediately search for ways to exploit or undermine the changes, and – more importantly – the effect on referees.

It is clear that referees do not like reducing teams to 10 men – this is particularly true in climactic Finals, when a red card is likely to lead to charges that "the ref ruined the game".

A replacement rule would remove the pressure on refs to "keep 11 men on the field". Hopefully, it would also reduce their reluctance to mete out deserved punishment. WS

> I have broached this topic before...I didn't like ejections then and I like them even less now. So, no more pussy-footing around

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Infantino's 48-team problem

Sometimes, it's as if FIFA does not even want to help itself; as if once someone has their foot through the front door in Zurich, the drawbridge is pulled up and outsiders' creativity is ignored.

The issue has been aroused yet again in the wake of the confusion over how the world federation and its president, Gianni Infantino, intend to formulate an expansion of the World Cup finals.

A host of arguments exist about why the World Cup should not merely be held at 32 teams but reduced in size, never mind expanded to 40 or 42 or 48. But those arguments are about the quality of the football rather than, sadly, about money and votes.

So, if expansion is around the corner, once Qatar 2022 is out of the way, then the next debate is how to accomplish the complication of more teams and more matches but in much the same four-week time slot.

Expansion is important to Infantino because it was one of the most popular of his manifesto promises. And in two years' time, barring another and more meaningful brush with the ethics committee, he will want to stand for re-election, so World Cup expansion would be a bright campaigning feather in his cap.

So he has been promoting World Cup expansion and kicking around ideas about how to do it.

His first idea involved 16 teams flying to the host country, playing one match, and then half of them flying straight back home again. Needless to say, that went down like a lead balloon.

Ignored by FIFA... tournament format specialist Leandro Shara

The next idea was 16 groups of three, possibly with penalty shoot-outs when matches were drawn. This way everyone has a minimum of two games, and after that the tournament reverts to the four-team group format.

There are, however, better ways to accomplish this, and the man with the answer is Leandro Shara from Chile. He has devised a multitude of tournament formats and promoted his systems at sports business conferences around the world, intriguing other sports and their governing federations.

Shara's systems are difficult to explain in cold print. They rely on putting teams in separate, seeding-allocated sectors so they play one team from each "pot", and the results are then used to build a single league table from which either more groups or a knockout competition can be formulated.

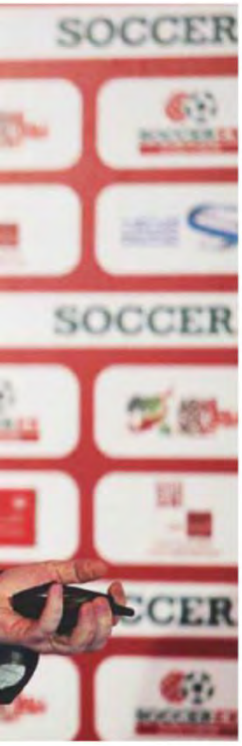
The beauty of the Shara system is that all 48 teams could go to a finals knowing that they can play the usual three games – and that the tournament would still be over and done in around the same time.

More teams, more matches, more television fees, more sponsorship cash – his systems would even carry an added bonus in obviating against the dangers of match-fixing.

So what's not to like? Especially for FIFA at a time when costs are being trimmed across the board to try to fulfil Infantino's other crucial manifesto promise of a bundle more development money.

Infantino and all those bright new – and mostly European – acolytes that are keen to curry favour should surely have called upon Shara, booked him first-class on the next flight from Santiago and put him up in whatever five-star hotel FIFA prefers these days now that the Baur au Lac has been

Expanding...more teams would mean more finals' matches



consigned to haunted history.

Instead, FIFA has left him standing on the doorstep and out in the cold.

Shara is quietly spoken and perhaps he did not shout loudly enough. At any rate, all his email missives to Infantino, secretary-general Fatma Samoura and various other luminaries at FIFA went unanswered. As polite as he is creative, Shara generously ascribes this to weight of business and confusing change within FIFA. From another standpoint, it looks like nothing less than sheer ignorant, bad manners.

Not only that, it also shows a lack of both commonsense and creative thinking. It's as if no one in football can think outside the box and – as Shara says – "doesn't think tournaments can be done without groups or play-offs".

The limited extent of Infantino's thinking was exposed at a media briefing after a recent FIFA Council, at which he was asked his opinion of the Shara systems. Infantino – the man who proposed World Cup expansion and might be presumed to have at least thought the idea through – looked baffled and responded that he had no idea what the questioner meant.

"More teams, more matches, more television fees, more sponsorship cash...what's not to like?"

Eventually, an aide of deputy general-secretary Zvonimir Boban did get back to Shara to say that it had no need of his services because FIFA had already found a solution which would need only the council's rubber stamp.

Which solution? The one-flight-halfway-round-the-world, the one-defeat, one game solution? Or the hopes-raised-and-quickly-dashed two-match solution?

Closed doors, it seems, signify closed minds. FIFA needs, as Prince Ali of Jordan once said most eloquently, to throw open the doors and the windows.

Shame his victorious election rival was not listening. WS

Final...Germany (in white) and Argentina in 2014

Brabook's brush with history

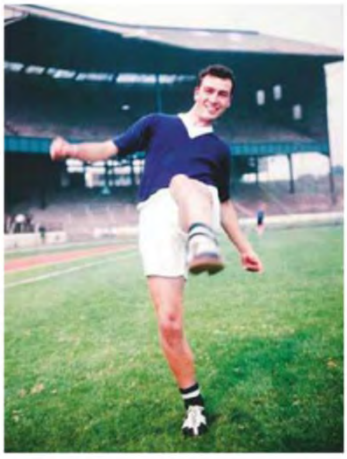
At the World Cup in Sweden in 1958, England and the Soviet Union finished level on points in their first-round group, behind Brazil, and had to play-off for a slot in the quarter-finals. Both had identical 4-4 goals tallies and their mutual match had ended 2-2.

For the play-off, England manager Walter Winterbottom gambled on a new right-wing partnership of Chelsea's Peter Brabrook and Wolverhampton Wanderers' Peter Broadbent.

Brabrook, on what was his international debut, saw one shot strike the Soviet woodwork and rebound into the hands of keeper Lev Yashin. In the second half, he had a goal disallowed and England lost 1-0 to a late goal from Anatoli Ilyin and were eliminated.

Brabrook played only twice more for his country. Such a difference, the thickness of a post.

Fate...Peter Brabrook won just three caps



Blatter can't help himself

Sepp Blatter, having failed in an appeal against his six-year ban at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, is still digging away at co-conspirator Michel Platini.

Blaming Platini for following French government orders in voting for Qatar for 2022 was not enough. Blatter also now accuses Platini of backing Morocco against South Africa, on the orders of president Jacques Chirac, for 2010.

Blatter should be grateful that at least he won that one.

Appeal...Sepp Blatter failed to overturn his appeal against a six-year ban

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

NOVEMBER 2016

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS

Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	10
Gianluigi DONNARUMMA (Milan)	7
Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	6
Gianluigi BUFFON (Juventus)	3
Manuel NEUER (Bayern Munich)	2
Diego ALVES (Valencia)	1
Willy CABALLERO (Manchester City)	1
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	1
Timo HORN (Cologne)	1
Brad JONES (Feyenoord)	1
Bernd LENO (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Keylor NAVAS (Real Madrid)	1
Maarten STEKELENBURG (Everton)	1
Javi VARAS (Las Palmas)	1

DEFENDERS

Laurent KOSCIELNY (Arsenal)	7
Filipe LUIS (Atletico Madrid)	7
Sergi ROBERTO (Barcelona)	7
Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	6
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	6
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	5
David LUIZ (Chelsea)	5
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	5
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	5
Alex SANDRO (Juventus)	5
Stefan SAVIC (Atletico Madrid)	5
Djibril SIDIBE (Monaco)	5
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	4
Kamil GLIK (Monaco)	4
Raphael GUERRERO (Borussia Dortmund)	4
Victor MOSES (Chelsea)	4
Rapahel VARANE (Real Madrid)	4
Dani ALVES (Juventus)	3
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (B D'mund)	3
Nicolas PAREJA (Sevilla)	3
Ricardo PEREIRA (Nice)	3
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	2
Hector BELLERIN (Arsenal)	2
Giorgio CHIELLINI (Juventus)	2
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	2
Sead KOLASINAC (Schalke)	2
Philipp LAHM (Bayern Munich)	2
Kostas MANOLAS (Roma)	2
Benjamin MENDY (Monaco)	2
James MILNER (Liverpool)	2
Shkodran MUSTAFI (Arsenal)	2
PEPE (Real Madrid)	2
Samuel UMTITI (Barcelona)	2
Raul ALBIOL (Napoli)	1
Toby ALDERWEIRELD (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Andrea BARZAGLI (Juventus)	1
Mattia CALDARA (Atalanta)	1
Joao CANCELO (Valencia)	1
Daniel CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	1
Nathaniel CLYNE (Liverpool)	1
DANILO (Real Madrid)	1
Stefan DE VRIJ (Lazio)	1
Jonas HECTOR (Cologne)	1
Benedikt HOWEDES (Schalke)	1
Stefan ILSANKER (RB Leipzig)	1
Branislav IVANOVIC (Chelsea)	1
JEMERSON (Monaco)	1
JUANFRAN (Atletico Madrid)	1
Dejan LOVREN (Liverpool)	1
Inigo MARTINEZ (Real Sociedad)	1
Joel MATIP (Liverpool)	1
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
NACHO (Real Madrid)	1
Cesar NAVAS (Rostov)	1
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	1
Winston REID (West Ham United)	1
Marcel RISSE (Cologne)	1
Marcel SCHMELZER (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Nelson SEMEDO (Benfica)	1
Kostas STAFYLIDIS (Augsburg)	1
Jan VERTONGHEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Jesus VALLEJO (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Virgil VAN DIJK (Southampton)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Philippe COUTINHO (Liverpool)	11
Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	9
Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	8
Emil FORSBERG (RB Leipzig)	8
Yannick FERREIRA CARRASCO (At Madrid)	7
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	7
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	5
SON Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	5
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	4
Mesut OZIL (Arsenal)	4
SUSO (Milan)	4
Tiemoue BAKAYOKO (Monaco)	3
THIAGO Alcantara (Bayern Munich)	3
ARDA Turan (Barcelona)	2
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	2
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	2
Ilkay GUNDOGAN (Manchester City)	2
Marek HAMSIK (Napoli)	2
Naby KEITA (RB Leipzig)	2
KOKE (Atletico Madrid)	2
Toni KROOS (Real Madrid)	2
Manuel LOCATELLI (Milan)	2
Miralem PJANIC (Juventus)	2
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	2
Arjen ROBBEN (Bayern Munich)	2
Dele ALLI (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Marcos ALONSO (Chelsea)	1
Felipe ANDERSON (Lazio)	1
Karim EL AHMADI (Feyenoord)	1
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
FABINHO (Monaco)	1
GABI (Atletico Madrid)	1
Jordan HENDERSON (Liverpool)	1
Sami KHEDIRA (Juventus)	1
Mateo KOVACIC (Real Madrid)	1
Adam LALLANA (Liverpool)	1
Gelson MARTINS (Sporting)	1
PIZZI (Benfica)	1
RAFINHA (Barcelona)	1
Franck RIBERY (Bayern Munich)	1
Mohamed SALAH (Roma)	1
Jean SERI (Nice)	1
Tonny VILHENA (Feyenoord)	1
Julian WEIGL (Borussia Dortmund)	1

FORWARDS

Edin DZEKO (Roma)	12
Edinson CAVANI (Paris Saint-Germain)	11
Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	11
Cristiano RONALDO (Real Madrid)	10
Anthony MODESTE (Cologne)	8
Diego COSTA (Chelsea)	6
Alexis SANCHEZ (Arsenal)	6
Antoine GRIEZMANN (Atletico Madrid)	5
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	5
Arkadiusz MILIK (Napoli)	5
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	4
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (B Dortmund)	3
Gonzalo HIGUAIN (Juventus)	3
Mario BALOTELLI (Nice)	2
Ousmane DEMBELE (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	2
Theo WALCOTT (Arsenal)	2
Timo WERNER (RB Leipzig)	2
Jose CALLEJON (Napoli)	1
Valere GERMAIN (Monaco)	1
Javier HERNANDEZ (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	1
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	1
Alvaro MORATA (Real Madrid)	1
NEYMAR (Barcelona)	1
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	1

"He thinks he's Buffon. I want him to leave as quickly as possible, though I don't know who will want him"

As hard-hitting as ever, Montpellier president Louis Nicollin (right) shows the door to keeper Geoffrey Jourdren

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

New at Nantes... Sergio Conceicao

EUROPE

GARETH SOUTHGATE was appointed permanent England manager on a four-year deal.

MARKKU KANERVA became coach of Finland following Hans Backe's departure.

SERGIO CONCEICAO replaced Rene Girard as coach of Ligue 1 strugglers Nantes.

Former Chelsea and Italy striker **GIANFRANCO ZOLA** was appointed manager of English second-tier side Birmingham City. **IAN CATHRO** left Scottish Premiership side Hearts for English third-tier club MK Dons.

MICHAEL VAN PRAAG was re-elected as president of the Royal Netherlands Football Association for a third term. Former USSR international Seilda Baishakov was elected president of the Football Federation of Kazakhstan for a four-year term.

New opportunity...Gus Poyet joined Shanghai Shenhua

Poyet takes Chinese option

Sacked by Spanish side Real Betis, Uruguayan coach **GUS POYET** took charge of Chinese Super League club Shanghai Shenhua. Former England boss **SVEN GORAN ERIKSSON** replaced Clarence Seedorf at second-tier side Shenzhen.

Permanent position...Gareth Southgate

SOUTH AMERICA

Former Bolivia coach **JULIO CESAR BALDIVIESO** took charge of Venezuelan club Carabobo, who will be in the 2017 Libertadores Cup.

CONCACAF

PACO JEMEZ, who was sacked by La Liga side Granada in September after six games, joined Cruz Azul after the Mexican side missed out on the apertura play-offs.

Belgian coach **TOM SAINTFIET** replaced Stephen Hart as Trinidad & Tobago coach. Former Colombia boss **EDUARDO LARA** took charge of El Salvador.

Reserve-team boss **CURT ONALFO** replaced Bruce Arena as coach of MLS side LA Galaxy.

AFRICA

Ex-Spain boss **JOSE ANTONIO CAMACHO** was appointed coach of Gabon. Out of football since being sacked by China in 2013, he signed a two-year deal to fill the vacancy left by Jorge Costa's dismissal.

GEORGE LWANDAMINA, who took Zambia's ZESCO United to the 2016 CAF Champions League semi-finals, was appointed coach of Tanzanian side Young Africans.

ASIA

Dutchman **PIM VERBEEK**, who previously coached South Korea and Australia, took charge of Oman.

OUT

EUROPE

Darmstadt dismissed coach **NORBERT MEIER** after six straight defeats in the Bundesliga. Augsburg parted company with **DIRK SCHUSTER** after only three league wins this season. Sporting director **KLAUS ALLOFS** left Wolfsburg after a poor start to the campaign.

Borussia Monchengladbach's Spanish defender **ALVARO DOMINGUEZ** retired aged just 27 due to ongoing back problems.

OLEKSANDR SHOVKOVSKIY, who won 14 Ukrainian league titles with Dynamo Kiev and is the only keeper in World Cup history not to concede in a penalty shoot-out, announced his retirement at the age of 41.

Over...Leonid Slutsky

Slutsky out at CSKA

LEONID SLUTSKY stepped down as CSKA Moscow coach after their final Champions League group game against Tottenham Hotspur.

Slutsky, who quit as coach of Russia after Euro 2016, had been in charge of CSKA since 2009 and had overseen a period of great success for the club, winning three league titles and two Russian cups.

He was replaced by **VIKTOR GONCHARENKO**, who left fellow Russian side Ufa.

SOUTH AMERICA

CUCA left Palmeiras after leading the club to their first Brazilian championship since 1994. Atletico Mineiro reacted to losing 3-1 at home to Gremio in the first leg of the Brazilian Cup Final by sacking coach **MARCELO OLIVEIRA** ahead of the return.

Champion...Cuca

CONCACAF

Tijuana's Argentinian goalkeeper **FEDERICO VILAR**, 39, retired after 519 games in the Mexican top flight. He was a Champions League and a Liga MX winner with Atlante, and a Copa MX winner with Morelia.

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

The problem with Pep

Pep Guardiola is an enigma. Those who defend him insist that, despite the failings and odd inconsistency of his Manchester City team – who are still, remember, in contention for the European Champions Cup – he has the plan to turn his team's fortunes around and astonish us all.

Which immediately poses the question of why he should have taken command of a City team so palpably in need of rebuilding, and one so heavily reliant on the opportunism of Sergio Aguero, whose sudden violent outburst against Chelsea had him sent off the field and suspended for weeks.

In Kevin De Bruyne, the gifted Belgian, he has an attacker who can win any game but who has sometimes been deployed away from the positions where he can do the most damage.

Yet it seems impossible, whatever his supporters in the press may say, for Guardiola to work the oracle with his present squad, while his arguably stubborn insistence of playing from the back with a goalkeeper deft with his feet has badly rebounded.

He allowed the England keeper – and recent hero of Slovenia – Joe Hart to leave on loan to Torino, replacing him with the erratic Claudio Bravo, who doesn't command much confidence with his feet, let alone his hands.

Enigma...Pep Guardiola

Off...Manchester City's Sergio Aguero (no10) is about to see red

As for John Stones, it is hardly Guardiola's fault that he is a defender of unquestioned talent but with a maddening propensity to make careless errors.

If, as his fan club insists, Guardiola has a tactical revolution in mind, where are the players, even when the transfer window re-opens, who can arrive and do it for him?

> If Guardiola has a tactical revolution in mind, where are the players, even when the transfer window re-opens, who can arrive and do it for him?

"Of course, I know how to defend," he says, honest enough to confront his criticism. "But we are going to play the way I feel, making mistakes, I cannot do something I don't feel. I believe in the way I like to play so I'm sorry I can't do that."

In his halcyon days at Barcelona, he could deploy a team which had learned its glittering habits almost from boyhood. At Bayern Munich, he had enough talent in the squad to make his methods work.

And now? "I hope they will give me a little more time to try," he says, emphasising it took Alex Ferguson seven years to win the championship for Manchester United.

But Ferguson didn't arrive trailing clouds of glory.

The Russian World Cup dilemma

Should Russia lose the ensuing World Cup? The demand should be heard after the renewed, appalling revelations about the extent of the state-sponsored doping of their Olympic athletes.

Somehow, however, I do not think that such a drastic punishment will happen to Russian football.

True, there is little doubt that the Russians are guilty as hell, but let us put the dismal matter into its dismal context. Who in recent years has not been guilty of buying the World Cup finals?

Qatar appallingly so. A country with no football tradition whatsoever, with no team capable of making any challenge for the title – bang utterly to rights. Yet even major European powers have sold out, agreeing that, thanks to the appalling summer heat which should have ruled out Qatar's bid in the first place, the tournament has been shamefully switched to the midst of the European season, with all the fixture chaos which will now ensue.

But what of the Germans in 2006? And what of the South Africans four years later? Did they not buy the World Cup as well?

Doping, is of course, another matter, as indeed is the threat of violence. Russia's athletes may have been drugged to the eyeballs but, so far as I know, there isn't evidence that Russian footballers have been drugged the same way.

Russia, for me, has always been an especially wretched choice, first on account of its endemic racism, with black players constantly subjected to abuse; secondly by the brutish behaviour of their supporters, so plainly and horribly evidenced by the organised brutality of their hooligan fans during the last European Championship finals.

Fears...Russian fans

A crass example of positive discrimination

Pressure is coming on the Football Association from the government which insists that it, and other sports associations, appoint women as 30 per cent of their executive or lose their subsidies. Surely a crass and arbitrary fortuity.

If there were enough women sufficiently qualified, which I beg leave to doubt, it would not trouble me were the quota to go to 100 per cent. But this is positive discrimination at its most blatant.

And it has been pointed out that the campaign has been led not by the minister in charge of such matters, Tracey Crouch, but by a notoriously self-publicising MP called Damian Collins.

The problem, of course, for both sides and for FIFA, is that the rules of FIFA expressly prevent any interference by outside bodies. So damned if you do, damned if you don't.

The FA has hurriedly agreed to appoint two top women to executive positions but this numerically is not enough.

Self-publicist... Damian Collins

Memories of a former FA secretary

FA secretary... Denis Follows

My mind goes back, not for the first time, to the evening of Denis Follows' surprise elevation to the FA Secretaryship in 1962.

He beat the obvious favourite Walter Winterbottom, thanks to the conniving of the notorious fixer Harold Thompson who, armed with an *Observer* article in favour of Winterbottom by the late and unlamented Clement Freud, persuaded the malleable committee members to vote in favour of Follows.

At Broadcasting House, I remember Follows telling us: "The Secretary is meant to be the servant of the Association and we all know what happened: the servant became the master."

And all the better for that, I thought at the time. Poor Follows.

Almost predictably, Thompson drove him into a nervous breakdown.

Lest we forget

When the Premier League was formed, to the detriment of the rest of the Football League, it was Graham Kelly, then the chief executive of the FA who combined with the big clubs to usher it through, ignoring the FA's historic remit to look after every club in the country.

Wasn't it the FA Premier League at the start, or am I merely fantasising?

Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

eye witness

Tim Vickery reports

BRAZIL

A tragedy like no other

Chapacoense awarded Sudamericana title after plane crash that claimed 71 lives

Distances are vast in South America and travel links can be awkward, especially for those clubs outside the main centres – like Chapecoense, from the small town of Chapeco in the south of Brazil, whose team was all but wiped out as their plane crashed on approach to Medellin airport in the early hours of November 29.

Logistical difficulties with conventional airlines meant that Bolivia-based LaMia, in their only operational aircraft, were carrying Chapecoense up to Colombia for the first leg of the Sudamericana Cup Final against Atletico Nacional.

The flight took off from Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Bolivia – as local air-traffic controller Celia Castedo pointed out, going direct to Medellin would be at the very limit of the plane's fuel capacity, contravening safety regulations. An investigation into the disaster, which took the lives of 71 of the 77 people on board, should take at least six months. But it already seems clear that the plane had run out of fuel. Pilot Miguel Quiroga was also part owner of the company, and specialists agree that he was thinking more like a businessman than a pilot in trusting that he had enough fuel for the trip.

Tribute...fans light candles at Chapecoense's stadium in Chapeco, Santa Catarina

It proved a fatal miscalculation and it could even have happened sooner, as it has come to light that, earlier in November, LaMia carried the Argentina team back to Buenos Aires after a World Cup qualifier in Belo Horizonte, Brazil – a flight of just over four hours, also dangerously close to fuel capacity. The investigation will clearly have to look into how this airline was being permitted to operate. As Bolivia's Defence Minister Reymi Ferreira said of the Chapecoense tragedy: "This was not an accident, it was a homicide."

> "This was not an accident, it was a homicide"
>
> Bolivia's Defence Minister, Reymi Ferreira

Devastation... the crash scene in Colombia

United...players and staff of Chapecoense remember colleagues

The fact that the crash seems to have been so evidently avoidable makes it all the more difficult for the relatives of those who perished.

As the news broke, the families of the

players, coaching staff and directors gathered at the club's stadium, enduring awful hours as hopes were extinguished and the news got gradually worse. It was quickly clear that there had been survivors, and the authorities in Colombia called on anyone local with a 4x4 vehicle to ferry them through tricky terrain to hospital. There were early reports of a death toll of 25 – which kept rising. In the end only seven made it alive to hospital – four players, two of the crew and a journalist. One of them, goalkeeper Danilo, passed away soon afterwards.

It was Danilo's last-second save in the semi-final against San Lorenzo that meant Chapecoense qualified for the Final. Theirs was a remarkable rise. Less than 10 years ago the club were not even part of Brazil's four national divisions. And here they were, the first Brazilian club in three years to make it through to a continental Final.

The secret was sound administration, coupling constant investment with living within their means, and there was one genuine class player in the squad: midfielder Cleber Santana, once of Atletico Madrid.

Most of the rest were journeymen professionals, who had come together to

forge something extraordinary.

As they made their quiet, steady progress, many in Brazil had not realised the magnitude of the team's achievement. Their Sudamericana matches were often taking place on the same night as decisive games in the Brazilian Cup, involving much bigger, more traditional clubs. All that came to an end with the disaster.

In addition to the obvious tragedy of a team being wiped out on its way to the biggest night of the players' lives, there were other factors pushing the story to the top of the agenda all over the country.

There was the fact that this was also the biggest disaster in the history of Brazilian journalism, with 20 members of the press dying, including ex-international midfielder Mario Sergio. And then there was the number of clubs that the Chapecoense players had represented earlier in their careers – some 90 teams up and down Brazil. The entire country appeared to be watching as the coffins arrived from Colombia and a wake was held in the club's Conda stadium. Everyone could relate to the events.

Prayers...a young fan at Arena Conda

Indeed, it was easy for the world of football to relate as players board a lot of planes. The global response was staggering, culminating in Atletico Nacional's request for Chapecoense to be declared Sudamericana champions.

This is a symbolic tribute to those who died, but it also has practical consequences. Chapecoense get the prize money, and also automatic qualification to the group stage of the 2017 Libertadores Cup – important aids to the arduous task that this modest club has of getting back on its feet.

Acting president Ivan Tozzo has struck a defiant note, stating: "The dream must go on." However, he dismissed the suggestion, made by other clubs, that Chapecoense should be protected against relegation for

Grief...Air Force troops carry the coffin of one of the victims into the Arena Conda in Chapeco

Respect...relatives of those killed attend a funeral ceremony

the next three years. "It's nonsense," he said. "This does not exist in football."

And though grateful for the thought, he was also unimpressed by talk of big-name stars coming out of retirement to play for the club.

The message is one of business as usual, of the resumption of a down to earth project which had served the club so well.

But the context is now very different, as new coach Vagner Mancini is well aware. Appointed on December 9, he made it clear in his first interview that this little club is now in the spotlight.

"We have to get a new team together as soon as possible," said Mancini. "And now Chapecoense are known all over the world. The players that come here will have to understand that." WS

Honour...club director Marcelo Zolet holds a replica of the Sudamericana Cup

The 71 who lost their lives

PLAYERS

Ailton Cesar Junior Alves da Silva (Canela)
Ananias Eloi Castro Monteiro
Arthur Brasiliano Maia
Bruno Rangel
Cleber Santana
Danilo Padilha
Dener Assuncao Braz
Everton Kempes dos Santos Goncalves
Filipe Jose Machado
Guilherme Gimenez de Souza
Jose Gildeixon Clemente de Paiva (Gil)
Josimar Rosado da Silva Tavares
Lucas Gomes da Silva
Marcelo Augusto Mathias da Silva
Mateus Lucena dos Santos
Matheus Bitencourt da Silva
Sergio Manoel Barbosa Santos
Tiago da Rocha (Thiaguinho)
Willian Thiego de Jesus

COACHING & TECHNICAL STAFF

Adriano Bitencourt
Anderson Donizette Lucas
Anderson Martins
Anderson Paixeo
Cleberson Fernando da Silva
Eduardo de Castro Filho
Eduardo Preuss
Gilberto Thomaz
Luiz Carlos Saroli (Caio Junior)
Luiz Cunha
Luiz Grohs (Pipe Grohs)
Marcio Koury
Rafael Gobbato
Sergio de Jesus

DIRECTORS & GUESTS

Davi Barela Davi
Decio Filho
Delfim de Padua Peixoto Filho
Edir De Marco
Emersson Domenico
Jandir Bordignon
Mauro Bello
Mauro Stumpf
Nilson Jr
Ricardo Porto
Sandro Pallaoro

JOURNALISTS

Andre Podiacki (reporter, Diario Catarinense)
Ari de Araujo Jr (reporter, Rede Globo)
Bruno Mauri da Silva (technician, RBS TV)
Devair Paschoalon (Deva Pascovicci) (commentator, Fox Sports)
Djalma Araujo Neto (cameraman, RBS TV)
Douglas Dorneles (reporter, Radio Chapeco)
Edson Ebeliny (reporter, Radio Super Conda)
Fernando Doesse Schardong (commentator, Radio Chapeco)
Gelson Galiotto (commentator, Radio Super Conda)
Giovane Klein Victoria (reporter, RBS TV)
Guilherme Marques (reporter, Rede Globo)
Guilherme Laars (cameraman, Rede Globo)
Jacir Biavatti (analyst, RICTV and Radio Vang FM)
Laion Espindola (reporter, Rede Globo)
Lilacio Pereira Jr. (Fox Sports)
Mario Sergio Pontes de Paiva (analyst, Fox Sports)
Paulo Julio Clement (journalist, Fox Sports)
Renan Agnolin (reporter, radio Oeste Capital)
Rodrigo Santana Goncalves (cameraman, Fox Sports)
Victorino Chermont (reporter, Fox Sports)

AIRLINE CREW

Alex Quispe
Angel Lugo
Gustavo Encina
Miguel Quiroga (pilot)
Ovar Goytia (co-pilot)
Romel Vacaflores
Sissy Arias

COLOMBIA

Mixed emotions

Nacional crash out of Club World Cup but earn praise for insisting Chapecoense are crowned Sudamericana champions

Atletico Nacional's all-conquering year ended with a whimper in Japan after a shock 3-0 loss to Kashima Antlers pulled the plug on a highly anticipated showdown with European champions Real Madrid in the Club World Cup.

Dumped into the ignominy of the third-place play-off after a dominant year in the domestic Colombian calendar and on the South American stage, Nacional came down to earth against the only invited club at the seven-team world championship.

The manner of Nacional's premature exit was utterly unexpected. Previously, no one had even come close to threatening a side that, in an 83-game season, had mopped up the domestic league, won a first Libertadores Cup title for 27 years and then triumphed in the Colombian Cup. Indeed, just a few weeks ago, they stood on the cusp of adding a record 16th league title and claiming a Libertadores-Sudamericana Cup double.

That Nacional had romped the domestic league stage despite largely fielding their B team – and, on occasions, a C team – underlined their vast superiority back home. This was a team that had already achieved greatness. But, as early as August, coach Reinaldo Rueda had identified the Club World Cup – and playing Real Madrid in the Final – as his main target. It was as if Colombia and South America no longer offered meaningful competition.

Touchdown...Nacional arrive at Kansai Airport in Japan

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and we cannot miss the train," the former Colombian national coach explained. "We have been playing well for months, for years in fact. We believe in ourselves and are dreaming about being champions."

But in Osaka the bubble burst. Despite 24 goal-scoring opportunities, Nacional stuttered under the pressure. Chance after chance fell their way in the first half, but as goalkeeper Franco Armani, put it: "The ball just didn't want to go in."

Midfielder Jhon Mosquera hit the bar twice, Orlando Berrio saw an effort cleared off the line, and both Mateus Uribe and Miguel Borja wasted opportunities when in good positions.

Borja looked a shadow of his former invincible self. With 39 goals in 2016, only Luis Suarez, Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored more than the 23-year-old striker in world football during the calendar year. But, after a November run of five games without a goal, the FIFA tournament clearly didn't arrive at the right moment for him.

But if Borja had seen his form slump of late, the opposite was true of Andres Ibarguen – a tricky winger whose performances had been littered with moments of impetuous individualism, but who arrived in Asia on top of his game. Had it not been for an injury he picked up just a few hours before the big kick-off, he would surely have offered a different dimension to Nacional's game.

> "Our main error was over confidence. We created a lot of chances but were wasteful and failed in our objective"
>
> **Nacional coach Reinaldo Rueda on losing to Kashima Antlers**

Of course, a bit of luck and Rueda's side might still have strolled to victory in a game they dominated for long stretches. But 61 per cent possession and eight clear chances weren't enough. Instead, their play was rushed, thoughtless and without the measured swagger that had long characterised the Medellin team's year.

"Our main error was over confidence," Rueda explained later. "We created a lot of chances but were wasteful and failed in our objective."

Certainly, Nacional's response to world football's first penalty awarded following consultation with video technology was one of panic. In the two minutes and 17 seconds that the official took before deciding to point to the spot, players

Respect...supporters light candles in Medellin following the air disaster

looked racked with confusion and drowned in injustice. Yet they knew full well about the rule change.

"That decision was decisive," confessed left-back Farid Diaz. "We had been playing really well but that threw us emotionally off balance; it changed the entire game."

For the 3,000 Nacional fans who had made the arduous journey half-way around the world, missing out on a dream clash with Real Madrid was a bitter pill to swallow. But for the estimated 800 supporters expected in Japan solely for the Final, the blow landed even deeper.

"I cried a lot this morning and I no longer feel like going," admitted one fan waiting at the airport. "I gave up my holidays with the family and couldn't even give my daughter the PlayStation she had wanted for Christmas."

Yet despite the disappointment, one match should not detract from what has been an incredible last 12 months for the Colombian club. Nacional were deserved winners of the Libertadores Cup, and even after the departure of six key players mid-season – Sebastian Perez, Alexander Mejia, Marlos Moreno, Victor Ibarbo, Davinson Sanchez and Jonathan Copete – they continued to steamroll past all opposition. Remaining faithful to Rueda's attacking and possession-based football, Nacional drew praise for being both successful and attractive to watch.

Going out...Yasushi Endo (in white) puts Kashima Antlers 2-0 up against Nacional

But if they had already confirmed their place as a respected powerhouse in South America, it took the events of November 29 to earn plaudits on a global stage, as a plane carrying 77 passengers ploughed into a mountain 17km from its destination. Chapecoense, Nacional's opponents in the Sudamericana Cup Final, were on board.

As the full shock and horror rattled across the world the following morning, Nacional's response was swift and firm: the Brazilian side, they insisted, must now be crowned champions.

In the aftermath of football's worst air disaster, this symbolic act – which also included the estimated $4million prize money – was commended worldwide. Of all the many gestures of solidarity and sorrow that flooded Colombia in the days to follow, this was succinctly the most perfect.

Third...fans at the play-off against Club America

CONMEBOL duly agreed and decided to hand Chapecoense the trophy two weeks later, with the organisation's Fairplay award going to Nacional.

It was as if the club was acting on behalf of a grieving city.

And in Medellin the pain bit hard. On the day of the Final that never was, vigils sprung up across the length and breadth of the country, and in Colombia's second city more than 120,000 gathered outside the stadium to pay their respects. It left Chapeco mayor, Luciano Buligon, in tears.

Unsurprisingly, the shadow of the tragedy also left its mark on the team, with players arriving at training broken and then in need of intense counselling ahead of the lengthy trip to Japan.

Once there, Nacional's emotionally charged season may not have ended as many had hoped and for the third time in seven years South America's top side failed to reach the Club World Cup Final. But one blip should not scar the record of a magnificent year.

Both on and off the pitch, Nacional have good reason to hold their heads high. WS

SPAIN

Ramos to the rescue

Real Madrid went on a new club record unbeaten run – thanks largely to their captain

It was the 92nd minute, and Deportivo La Coruna and Real Madrid were drawing 2-2 in the Santiago Bernabeu when, high in the north stand, a chant began. "And Sergio Ramos scores a goal!" it ran.

And those supporters were still singing it when Ramos did score a goal, leaping to head home the winner.

Everyone ran to the corner and piled on, Marcelo standing back, alongside the mound of bodies, looking to the stands and beating his chest as if he was Tarzan. Further up the touchline, Zinedine Zidane was smiling a huge, incredulous smile. He'd only gone and done it again.

A week earlier, Ramos had scored in the 90th minute to claim a draw in the *Clasico* against Barcelona. It had been a huge goal too, one that rescued the league leaders from a first defeat of the season and kept them six points clear, denying their rivals the chance to reduce the lead to just three points and blow the title race wide open.

Andres Iniesta called it "hard to take" as they had been so close. Leading 1-0 through Luis Suarez, both Neymar and Lionel Messi had clear chances to kill off the game, but it had gone into the last minute – Ramos time.

First..Zinedine Zidane's Real Madrid top La Liga

"We believed right to the end. I have to highlight this team's heart yet again," pointed out Zidane. He also said he was not surprised Ramos had appeared when they most needed it. "That's what Ramos has," Madrid's manager added. "He is always there."

It certainly feels that way; there's something about Ramos, that's for sure.

He was there when the clock showed 92.48 in the Champions League Final in Lisbon, rescuing his side with a header. A tattoo reminds him of the time, all the time. He had scored two headers against Bayern in Munich to take them there. He scored in the Final of the Club World Cup, and in the semi-final too. And when Madrid returned to a Champions League Final – this time in Milan, against Atletico – he scored again.

At the start of this season, he scored the late, late winner in the European Super Cup against Sevilla. So, Zidane had a point when he said he wasn't surprised that Ramos had scored in the *Clasico*. It was one of those moments again; a big one, and not just because it was Barca. With considerable understatement, Zidane called it an "important" point.

This season, everyone at Madrid has publicly insisted that the league title is the priority – and that coming from a club that has built its identity through the European Cup. After the *Clasico*, asked if the draw might prove decisive, Zidane insisted: "I don't think so...this is very long, there are lots of games to go, but we're very happy with the point.

"If we had lost, after a game like that, it would have been hard for us. We have a six-point lead, but nothing will change."

Things already are changing, though – or so it seems. Six points is Madrid's biggest lead since the spring of 2012, when they won their only league title of the last eight years. But a week later, against Depor, that looked set to be reduced to four, only for Madrid to win a 92nd-minute corner and the fans in the north stand to start singing.

Jaw-dropping...Sergio Ramos after heading the winner against Deportivo

With Ramos' goal, Madrid took their unbeaten run to 35 games – a new club record and just four behind Barcelona's Spanish best of 39. If they were to match that, they would still be one behind Nottingham Forest's 40 games from 1977-78, and three away from Antonio Conte's Juventus on 43.

Madrid won 26 and drew nine during

> "We believed right to the end. I have to highlight this team's heart yet again"
>
> **Zinedine Zidane on Real Madrid's draw at Barcelona**

that run. They were unbeaten this season after 24 games – one off their record, which stands at 25 – and they had gone 27 unbeaten in the league, stretching back to last spring and closing in on Real Sociedad's record run of 38 games.

But it hasn't been as easy as the stats might suggest. A last-minute equaliser in December's *Clasico*, following on from two late goals in last year's. Two late goals against Sporting of Lisbon. A penalty shoot-out against Atletico Madrid, of course. That last-minute winner against Sevilla in the Super Cup.

The run has included five 3-2s and three 2-2s. It has also seen four draws in a row – after which Zidane was asked if the team was in a crisis. He responded: "No, but...we can't go on like this." Although that now feels like a long time ago, it was only September.

It sounds ridiculous, but Madrid have not always impressed greatly. There have been few really outstanding performances recently, yet they always find a way. Ramos warned after the 3-2 win against Depor: "We have to reflect." Zidane was also keen to stress that epic comebacks and late goals do not always augur well in the long term. The club's president was moved to ask the players if they could please win without suffering in future.

But the bottom line is this: they have kept on winning.

Strength in depth obviously helps and it is telling that 20 different players have scored for them this season. The figures broker no argument, especially recently. Some have suggested that Madrid have not played that many really good sides this season, but then they went away to the

Classic...Sergio Ramos scores against Barca

Calderon and beat Atletico 3-0. Still, you wondered, but then they went to Camp Nou and drew with Barcelona. Sure, they scored a late equaliser, and they should have been out of it by then, but they had been the better side in the first half.

"I am a lucky coach," Zidane admitted, "but it's not just that." The fact that he was asked was telling; it echoed a view held by many, a theme that has been repeated often. The Frenchman might have taken offence at the suggestion, but he never seems to take offence at all. Instead, he smiles, smoothly, gently handling the pressure and the press.

He also claimed he felt he had a "lucky star". He'd had it as a player too, he said, but back then he had so much more than just luck, and the lucky argument becomes weaker with each week when it comes to Zidane the coach too.

Few expected Zidane to be a such a huge success after replacing Rafa Benitez, and that includes the club hierarchy. On taking charge, his first obsession was the physical condition of the team; his second was their emotional condition. The players felt liberated. To listen to them in the final months of last season was to hear of their enthusiasm returning. Zidane understood them. "He came in and didn't tread on anyone's toes," Marcelo said. What he did was calmly set about changing things, seemingly taking it all in his stride.

Zidane had the moral authority that Benitez did not: with players, fans and the president. The media too, although there has been criticism and doubt.

Even the injuries didn't concern him; at times, they even appeared to suit him. He had the astuteness, intelligence and tact that was needed, the competitiveness and political awareness too, and a flexible, pragmatic, sometimes cautious tactical approach that some think reflects his time in Italy. It was most evident against Atletico when he played with Isco behind Ronaldo and it worked wonderfully.

> "I am a lucky coach"
>
> **A modest Zinedine Zidane**

Without making a fuss, he brought Casemiro into the side and he left out James Rodriguez. An issue that had been poisonous for his predecessor was different with Zidane.

Mateo Kovacic and Lucas Vazquez, two players Benitez had brought to the club, but who were all but dismissed by critics and rarely seen as starters, played a greater role than ever before – and the opportunity afforded them by injury was not passed up.

Everything Zidane did seemed to work and the surprise at changes was diminished by their success.

What he has achieved is extraordinary, with the best start any coach has ever had – 50 games in charge and just two losses: one of them a Champions League first-leg defeat that was overturned in the return, the other a league reverse against Atletico that was avenged in Milan.

In the league, his record reads: played 35, won 28, drawn six, lost one.

His side are the only one in Europe's top five leagues not to have been beaten this term. He has won the Champions League, the UEFA Super Cup and in December, the Club World Cup. And then there is La Liga, where Madrid's lead is bigger than its been for four years.

Few expected it, but Zidane has something, that's for sure.

He has Sergio Ramos, for a start. WS

Chance...Isco (left) played against Atletico

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Lasana Liburd reports

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Hart problems

Soca Warriors change their World Cup qualifying coach...again

News that Trinidad & Tobago changed their coach in the middle of the 2018 World Cup qualifying campaign should be as startling as the revelation that "rain is wet" for those who are familiar with the two-island Caribbean republic.

In the last 24 years, only once has a coach managed to survive an entire World Cup campaign with the Soca Warriors – and that was when Otto Pfister's team crashed out against Guyana in the opening round of the 2010 series before most "Trinbagonians" realised the qualifiers were even underway.

Everybody knew about coach Stephen Hart's side, though. A Trinidadian by birth, Hart has spent most of his adult life in Canada, and he might look back and wonder if he has been a victim of his own success.

In 2013, he took over an international team that, although beginning to show signs of recovery, were in the doldrums after the devastation of the Jack Warner era, which left the local game penniless, in debt and with a deeply tainted reputation.

Under Hart, T&T advanced to successive Gold Cup quarter-finals, where they lost by a late goal to Mexico in 2013 and on penalties to Panama in 2015. But while the style of football was workmanlike at best, at least the team appeared to be holding its own with CONCACAF's finest for the first time since their historic qualification for the 2006 World Cup.

Two thrilling draws with Mexico in quick succession – 4-4 in the July 2015 Gold Cup and 3-3 in a friendly, two months later – further convinced fans that their team was capable of great things.

But, in November 2015, Trinidad & Tobago Football Association (TTFA) president Raymond Tim Kee was replaced by David John-Williams.

There were rumours of a deep distrust between the coach and the new football president – at least on the coach's side – and results on the pitch since then have been undeniably poor.

> Under Hart, Trinidad & Tobago advanced to successive Gold Cup quarter-finals

In 17 competitive matches under Kee's watch, Hart had returns of nine wins, four draws and four losses, with 32 goals and 17 conceded. Of those four defeats, two were on penalties, to Panama and Jamaica, while the other two came within the first two months of his tenure.

Since John-Williams took up the mantle, the Warriors have played nine competitive games and won three, drew one and lost five, scoring 16 times and conceding just as many.

Notably, T&T's only wins in 2016 came against St Vincent & the Grenadines (twice) and Martinique. And, after an abject performance in a 3-1 loss away to Honduras in October, it was clear that Hart was in trouble.

Hart's supporters point to John-Williams' unsettling and antagonistic behaviour towards the national senior side from virtually day one, as the president nearly sparked a players' strike with flippant remarks about owed match fees. He also put the positions of Hart's support staff up for tender on a jobs website.

The fact that the TTFA president is also the owner of W Connection, a local side who contribute several players to the national team, only added to unease in the dressing room.

John-Williams' decision to allegedly interrupt a training session in May to offer the players a warm-up game that the coach had already declined, was seen as a forerunner to the discipline problems which later dogged the team.

And while Hart's loyalty to players such as uncompromising ex-Premier League centre-forward Kenwyne Jones might have been largely sensible, it has not always gone down well with fans who prefer

Uncompromising...Kenwyne Jones (in red)

Leader...Stephen Hart

slippery, bustling attackers.

Hart's replacement is Tom Saintfiet, a Belgian who has spent 13 of his 14 years as a professional coach at second and third-tier football nations in Africa.

The 43-year-old is the 16th coaching appointment made by the TTFA since the start of the millennium. However, in what could be seen as a sign of things to come, John-Williams informed the media at Saintfiet's unveiling in December that "if he doesn't get the job done [against Panama and Mexico] on the 24 and 28 of March, he will be looking for a job."

Tom Saintfiet, T&T coach, hired and served notice of his dismissal all on the same day. WS

Warned...Tom Saintfiet

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO COACHES

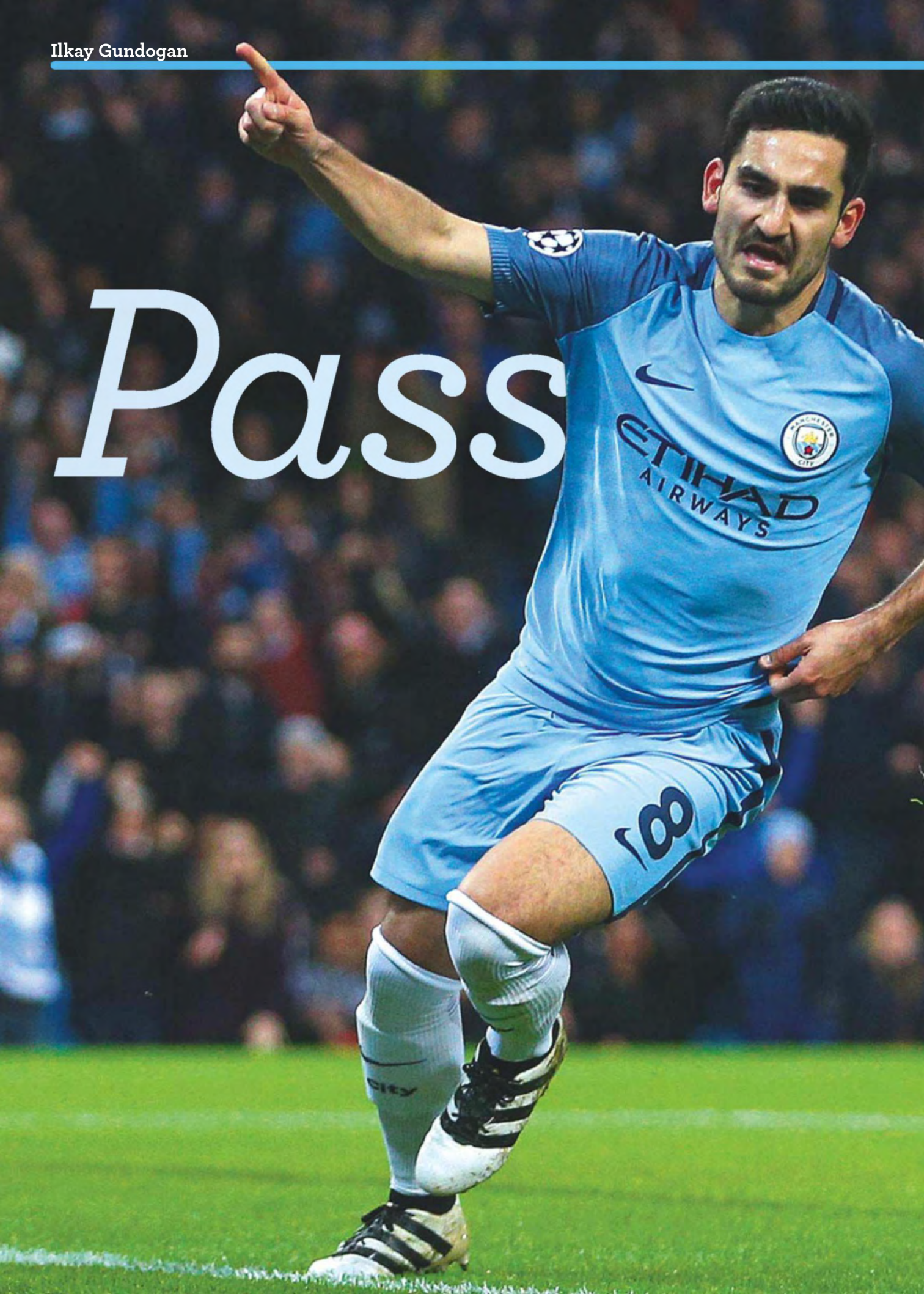
WORLD CUP CAMPAIGN COACHES

1990 Everald "Gally" Cummings
1994 Kenny Joseph, Clovis De Oliviera (Bra)
1998 Zoran Vranes (Ser), Sebastiao Pereira de Araujo (Bra)
2002 Ian Porterfield (Sco), Rene Simoes (Bra)
2006 Bertille St Clair, Leo Beenhakker (Hol)
2010 Francisco Maturana (Col), Russell Latapy
2014 Otto Pfister (Ger)
2018 Stephen Hart, Tom Saintfiet (Blg)

COACHES THIS MILLENIUM

Bertille St Clair, Ian Porterfield (Sco), Rene Simoes (Bra), Clayton Morris (caretaker), Jamaal Shabazz (caretaker who was replaced before his first game), Hannibal Najjar, Zoran Vranes (Ser, caretaker), Stuart Charles-Fevrier (StL), Bertille St Clair, Leo Beenhakker (Hol), Wim Rijsbergen (Hol), Francisco Maturana (Col), Russell Latapy, Otto Pfister (Ger), Hutson Charles/Jamaal Shabazz (co-coaches), Stephen Hart, Tom Saintfiet (Blg)

Pass



master

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Manchester City's German midfielder Ilkay Gundogan is keen to make up for lost time

One of the most complete midfielders in Europe when fit and firing, German international Ilkay Gundogan has proved an instant hit at Manchester City following his £21 million summer move from Borussia Dortmund. He has quickly established himself as a vital component in Pep Guardiola's engine room, supplying enough craft, energy and aggression for three men, and elevating himself to the rank of cult hero after scoring twice in the 3-1 Champions League victory over Barcelona.

Not that the 26-year-old was always as quick to integrate on changing clubs.

After leaving Nuremberg for Bundesliga champions Dortmund in 2011, his first six months at the Westfalenstadion were, by common consent, a disaster. Pilloried for his poor form and dropped from the first team only a few weeks into the campaign, he was initially seen by fans and media alike as a "*Fehleinkauf*" (bad buy).

As forthright as ever, Dortmund coach, Jurgen Klopp laid it on the line at the time,

Timeline

MAY 24, 2009
Makes his debut for Nuremberg, as a sub, in a 2-1 win at home to Munich 1860 as his side are promoted to the Bundesliga.

MAY 16, 2010
Scores in a relegation/promotion play-off v Augsburg to help secure Nuremberg's Bundesliga status for another season.

MAY 5, 2011
After helping Nuremberg to finish seventh, he joins the Bundesliga champions, Borussia Dortmund.

JUL 23, 2011
Scores in the shoot-out on his Dortmund debut, but they lose on penalties to Schalke in the German Super Cup.

OCT 11, 2011
Makes his senior international debut for Germany in a 3-1 win at home to Belgium in a Euro 2012 qualifier.

DEC 17, 2011
Gets himself on the scoresheet for the first time since joining Dortmund, in his side's 4-1 win away at Freiburg.

saying: "For someone of his capabilities, he's still not sufficiently dominant for me. He has the potential to make a much bigger contribution to a game and be more prepared to go on the attack."

Back then, the prevailing view was that Gundogan's failure to launch his Dortmund career was entirely his own fault. However, what the critics seemed to forget was the huge task he faced: settling in at his first big club, the greater media scrutiny, and filling the gap left by Real Madrid-bound Nuri Sahin, who had performed so impressively the previous season.

"It would do me good if I was accepted here as Ilkay Gundogan and not a copy of Nuri Sahin," he declared in an interview on German TV programme Sportschau.

"I know we play the same position and naturally comparisons will be made, but the important thing is that I don't put too much pressure on myself."

Another problem he had to solve was getting to grips with Klopp's brand of pressing and transitions. Rumoured to be overweight on turning up for pre-season, he had a weighty new script to learn, and like so many new arrivals at the club in recent times – including Marco Reus, Robert Lewandowski, Henrikh Mkhitaryan and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang – he would need a lengthy spell in the workshop before being fully ready to roll.

With Nuremberg he had been the undisputed number one; the brilliant young showstopper who set the tone. But at Dortmund he would have to prove himself all over again, and early on it was a painful process, with his club frustrations starkly contrasting with the joy of his first cap for Germany in a seven-minute sub appearance against Belgium in 2011.

When the 2011-12 season resumed after the winter break, he again found himself surplus to requirements. But the tide was soon to turn as Klopp increasingly put trust in him and the youngster responded with a string of fine performances.

Trust...with Jurgen Klopp at Dortmund

Two episodes signposted his transformation from misfit to key contributor. In a German Cup semi-final against Greuther Furth, he came off the bench to score the winner with the last kick of extra-time, and then a week later he underlined his growing influence in a topsy-turvy 4-4 draw against Stuttgart in the Bundesliga. Dortmund had been coasting at 2-0 up with Gundogan at the controls, but subsequently fell apart when he was substituted on 67 minutes.

His semi-final heroics, however, would not be a guarantee of special treatment. While he was detained in the mixed zone, the team bus left without him and it would be several minutes before anyone noticed. There followed an about-turn for the bus and a standing ovation for a sheepish Gundogan as he stepped on board.

During the last few months of that season, he was outstanding, and by the time the final curtain came down in May he had every reason to be satisfied. His doubters trounced, his role as Black-and-Yellow starter secured, he had a domestic League and Cup double to savour.

Rated the best defensive midfielder of the 2012 "Spring Championship" by *Kicker* magazine, he would perform at an even higher level in his sophomore season for the Dortmunder. World-class in his vision and passing, he made great strides defensively and looked like the ideal midfield all-rounder.

Some of his most memorable displays of 2012-13 came in his side's march to the Champions League Final. Man of the match in a 1-1 draw at Manchester City in the group phase, he was equally to the fore in both legs of the semi-final against Real Madrid, comfortably out-performing Xabi Alonso in the battle of the strategists.

He suffered a heartbreaking 2-1 loss in the Final to Bayern Munich at Wembley, but at least he had a bumper consolation prize: a silver medal, confirmed A-lister status and a goal on the night, coolly slotting home his side's equaliser from the penalty spot.

Often dubbed Germany's answer

MAR 20, 2012

Comes on as a sub and then scores the winner in the last minute of extra-time against Greuther Furth in the German Cup semi-finals.

MAY 12, 2012

Having retained their Bundesliga title, Dortmund complete their first-ever double as they beat Bayern Munich 5-2 in the Cup Final.

MAR 26, 2013

Scores his first goal for his country as they beat Kazakhstan 4-1 in a World Cup qualifier on his old club ground at Nuremberg.

MAY 25, 2013

Scores an equaliser from the penalty spot against Bayern Munich in the Champions League Final, but Dortmund end up losing 2-1.

AUG 14, 2013

Scores for Germany in a friendly against Paraguay but gets injured and will miss the rest of the season and the World Cup in Brazil.

Competitive....battling with Bayern Munich's Douglas Costa

Double... lifting the 2012 title with Ivan Perisic

to Xavi, he radiates intelligence – and has the same astute approach off the pitch. In marked contrast to most fledgling pros, he insisted on completing his secondary education, spending much of his time at Nuremberg studying for his "Abitur" - the German equivalent to English A levels – at the Bertolt Brecht high school.

"It's not easy to get up early in the morning to prepare for an exam before going to training," said the star pupil in an interview with the Bavarian football association. "To fit two training sessions into the normal school day. Yet I was relaxed about it. I didn't see school as a strain. More as a break from football."

Nuremberg, who acquired him from the youth section of Ruhr outfit Bochum, was also the place where he gained his senior football passing grades. In 2009-10, he marked his first full season by helping the club preserve their top-flight status, scoring a vital goal in the second-leg of the relegation/promotion play-off against Augsburg. And with the rave reviews rolling in, he continued to blossom the following season, inspiring the club's unexpected emergence as a top-six force.

Linking up in the attacking third with best friend Mehmet Ekici and Julian Schieber, he was the jewel in Nuremberg's crown. However, with so many clubs showing an interest – among them Bayern Munich, Bayer Leverkusen, Hoffenheim and Hamburg – the club's top brass were unlikely to retain him for long. And when champions Dortmund tabled a mouth-watering offer of €6million, including performance bonuses and €1.5m salary, there was only one possible outcome.

His move back to the Ruhr was not without its complications. Football is a tribal business and it took no time at all for Dortmund fans to latch onto the fact that he was a born and bred Gelsenkirchener, the territory of arch-rivals Schalke, and that he played for them as a schoolboy.

> "I've always said that my decision was not anti-Turkey but pro-Germany"
>
> Gundogan on his international choice

He had not lingered long at Schalke, wearing Royal Blue for just one season at the age of eight, but in the Ruhr the lines of demarcation are a paramount. For a while he was regarded with suspicion by some on the Westfalenstadion terraces, only eventually extinguishing the pettiness with his sublime performances.

Attack...at Nuremberg with Julian Schieber

"I know where I've come from," he told Germany *GQ*. "Gelsenkirchen is my home and that won't alter whatever the colour of my shirt."

Despite his deep roots in Gelsenkirchen, an enduring relationship with Schalke just was not meant to be. "It was a dream to play for Schalke and as it all so ended so quickly, it was hard for me to take," he told Ruhr publication *Reviersport* in 2011. "I had problems with both my Achilles. In the second-half of that season, I couldn't play at all. It became clear that my chance had gone. When I was 13, Schalke came in for me once more, but I didn't go for it. I was worried about being disappointed again."

Instead, he carried on playing for local minor league teams SV Hessler and SSV Buer, and after turning on the style for them he was inducted a couple of years later into Bochum's academy, where he would work with coach Michael Oenning, who would take him to Nuremberg in a €50,000 deal.

Oenning remains a huge Gundogan

OCT 18, 2014

After more than a year out injured on the sidelines, he returns to action as Dortmund lose 2-1 away to Cologne in the league.

MAY 30, 2015

After a disappointing league campaign, Dortmund reach the German Cup Final but are disappointed again as they lose 3-1 to Wolfsburg.

APR 20, 2016

Comes on as a sub in a 3-0 German Cup semi-final win away to Hertha Berlin in what will be the last match he plays for Dortmund.

fan and is so keen to sing his praises. "Ilkay is the sort of player you warm to," he once declared. "He listens, he repays your trust in him. A very humble player. He doesn't make the same mistake twice. I don't think there's going to be any holding him at the top level."

The son of Turkish immigrant parents – father Erfan and mother Ayten – Gundogan could have gone the ancestral route when selecting his international destiny. He was more interested in Turkish football than German while growing up, and as soon as he made the Nuremberg first team he was courted by Turkey. But Gundogan only had eyes for the DfB.

"I've always said that my decision was not anti-Turkey but pro-Germany," he told *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. "My family left me free to make my own choice. I'd played for Germany's under-18s and felt comfortable in the squad.

"There was no concrete sign that I'd make the senior *Nationalmannschaft*, but I thought I had a chance."

In order to better assimilate, his mother and father chose to settle in Hessler, a quarter of Gelsenkirchen which was a mainly German district and encouraged their two boys, Ilkay and elder brother Ilker, to knuckle down at school.

Ilker who had a spell with Nuremberg's under-23s, would subsequently obtain a BA in East Asian Economics and Politics and recently completed his masters.

For a relatively small town, Gelsenkirchen has a remarkable track record of churning out high-grade talent: Schalke stars of the 1930s Ernst Kuzorra and Fritz Szepan; 1954 World Cup winner Bernhard Klodt; legendary 1960s and 70s winger Reinhard Libuda; 1980s midfield ace Olaf Thon; the Altintop brothers, Hamit and Halil, who both opted to play for Turkey; and a trio of current idols in Manuel Neuer, Mesut Ozil and Gundogan.

He was just three years old when his father first took him to the ash pitch at the Friedrich-Ludwig-Jahn Stadium and it would not take long for him to master both the ball and opponents.

"Technically he was fantastic and also a fighter," recalls one of his early years coaches, Ralf Rielemann. "He was small and skinny and often up against older boys, but managed to hold his own."

As it was then, so it is now. Not especially powerful, nor particularly quick, he is able to compensate with quick-thinking and natural talent on the ball.

Unfortunately, the other recurrent theme of his career has been his susceptibility to injury, and in the last three seasons he has had his fill of the operating room and rehab gym. He was sidelined for 14 months in 2013 and 2014 with a complicated back problem and dislocated his knee-cap towards the end of last season; a freak incident which happened while playing basketball.

Long regarded as the heir apparent to Bastian Schweinsteiger as Germany's midfield traffic cop, he was forced to miss both Germany's triumphant World Cup 2014 campaign and Euro 2016, and he is yet to play a single match in a top international tournament.

As a result of such setbacks, Gundogan now claims to be much tougher mentally and more appreciative of his privileged sporting life. "I believe that such long absences from the game do have their value," he said in a recent interview with *Kicker*. "I've learnt to look at things differently.

"If I play badly in a match, I know I've the ability to put it right in the next and if I'm ruled out for a couple of games, it's not a drama. Already in 2012, I was thinking about the 2014 World Cup.

"The disappointment of missing that competition was too much. Now I don't look so far ahead. I'm more focused more on the here and now."

If anyone deserves to shine at Russia 2018, it's Ilkay Gundogan, the German master of the short pass. **WS**

Cult hero...in action for Manchester City against Barcelona

> "He listens, he repays your trust in him...he doesn't make the same mistake twice. I don't think there's going to be any holding him at the top level"
>
> **Former Nuremberg coach Michael Oenning**

Internatioinal...taking on San Marino

JUN 2, 2016
Agrees a four-year contract with Manchester City and becomes the first signing for former Bayern coach Pep Guardiola at the club.

SEP 14, 2016
Makes his debut for City in a 4-0 win at home to German club Borussia Monchengladbach in the Champions League.

SEP 17, 2016
Three days after making his City debut, he scores his first goal for the club in a 4-0 Premier League win at home to Bournemouth.

NOV 1, 2016
Scores twice in a fantastic City performance as the side beat Barcelona 3-1 at home in the Champions League.

Ilkay Gundogan

the numbers game

TRANSFER FEES

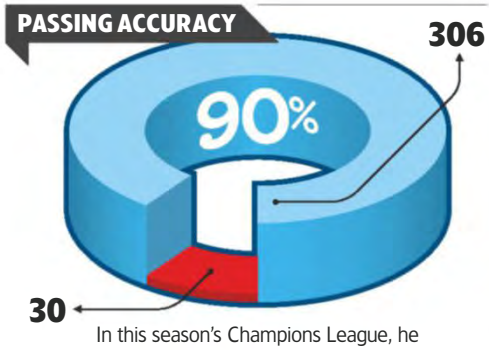
£3m

NUREMBERG to **BORUSSIA DORTMUND** (May 2011)

£21m

BORUSSIA DORTMUND to **MANCHESTER CITY** (June 2016)

PASSING ACCURACY



In this season's Champions League, he completed 306 of 336 attempted passes

HONOURS

80

Matches missed following a back injury sustained in August 2013

INTERNATIONAL RECORD

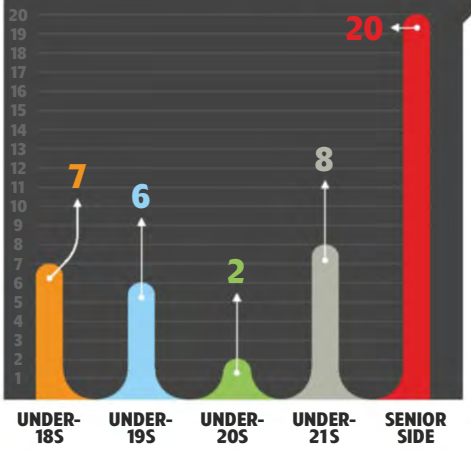
20

CAPS

GOALS

4

GERMANY CAPS



ESM TEAM OF THE YEAR 2012-13

GAMES GOALS (*up to & including 10.12.16)

25 stories to follow in 2017

In a special feature, *World Soccer* writers tackle some of the key questions facing football over the coming 12 months

1 CAN LILLE AVOID RELEGATION?

It's May 21, 2011, and Lille coach Rudi Garcia is basking in the glory of some impressive footballing achievements. Less than two weeks previously, the 47-year-old masterminded his side's 1-0 win over Paris Saint-Germain to land the French Cup. Now, after a hard-fought 2-2 draw with the same opponents, he has delivered Lille Olympique Sporting Club's first French championship since 1954 with a game to spare.

Lille's side includes Yohan Cabaye, Mathieu Debuchy, Idrissa Gueye, Gervinho and Eden Hazard – hugely exciting talents who will all go on to play in England's Premier League – and Garcia is rightly excited about just how far his dynamic young team can go and Lille's overall ambitions for the future.

Champion...Lille's Rio Mavuba lifts the title in 2011

Having posted an average home attendance of 16,426 in their 17,963-capacity Stadium Lille Metropole, club president Michel Seydoux has his sights firmly fixed on much bigger and better things. And with a brand new, state-of-the-art 50,000-capacity home due to open in August 2012, Lille are talking up their ambitions of becoming not only a domestic powerhouse but also a regular fixture on the European stage. For the northern club, the sky appears to be the limit.

Fast forward to the end of 2016, and punters and pundits alike are wondering what the hell happened to the dream?

Lille haven't won a single trophy since that famous day in Paris, Garcia left for Rome in 2013, and only one member of the starting XI that clinched the title in 2011 – veteran midfielder Rio Mavuba – is still at the club.

The project to be French top dogs has been blown out of the water by PSG's Qatari-fuelled surge to the top. And this season the wheels have really come off. Three games shy of the season's half-way point, Lille were just three points ahead of the relegation play-off spot. As for continental aspirations, defeat by Azerbaijani side Qabala in the qualifying stage of this term's Europa League put paid to those for another year.

Hopeful...Lille's Adama Soumaoro gets the better of Caen's Pape Sane

The project to be top dogs was blown out of the water by PSG... and this season the wheels have really come off

So why has the fall from grace been so spectacular? Well, you don't have to look too far for answers.

Garcia's managerial reign ended in 2013 after six years of stability and progress. But since then the club has lurched from one crisis to the next, going through three coaches in three years as the demand for success sets the stakes ever higher.

Rene Girard, who won the Ligue 1 title

with Montpellier in 2012, lasted less than 24 months. Then former Ivory Coast boss Herve Renard took charge for a disastrous six months, before the much-travelled Frederic Antonetti was in turn sacked in November, a year to the day after arriving at the club. At present, Patrick Collot is currently in temporary control, having previously taken over for a short period following the sacking of Renard.

Seydoux has a reputation for steady progression as president, but it seems that big ambitions have led to overall patience wearing thin. Or maybe he believes he's taken Lille as far as he can.

In the five years since their title triumph, Lille's average home attendance has risen to 27,373. But while that's an increase of over 10,000 in under six years, support still falls short of the expectations for a club that once held such lofty ambitions.

With Seydoux looking to sell the club, 44-year-old Spanish/Luxembourgian businessman Gerard Lopez has lodged a formal offer. Having made his money in IT, he is an avowed sports nut who has already purchased the Lotus Formula 1 racing team. And, naturally, Lopez also has big ambitions for Lille, saying he wants LOSC to be one of the top three sides in France and consistently rivalling PSG within three years.

As football's owners become ever richer and ever more hungry for major success, Lille's story offers a salutary tale of how it can all go wrong – and quickly. Yet hope springs eternal, and once again a moneybags has arrived on the scene with ever-greater plans.

Only time will tell if Lille's current predicament is nothing more than a blip on the road as the club attempts to force its way onto football's top table.

Howard Johnson

2 CAN IVORY COAST RETAIN THE AFRICAN NATIONS CUP?

The African champions begin their defence of the Nations Cup against Togo on January 16, but they will be without the retired Yaya Toure, the hero of their triumph in Equatorial Guinea two years ago.

Full tournament preview, page 54

Holders...Ivory Coast were successful in 2015

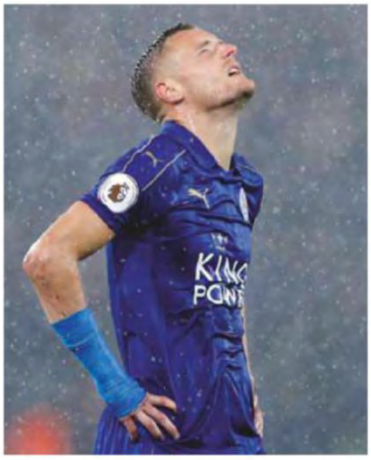
3 WILL LEICESTER CITY BECOME THE FIRST ENGLISH CHAMPIONS TO BE RELEGATED SINCE MANCHESTER CITY IN 1938?

After an accomplished start to the Champions League, winning their opening three games, a 5-0 thrashing by Porto in their final group game, when several key players were rested, exposed the fragility of Leicester's squad.

More worrying was their Premier League form and in early December they sat two points above the relegation zone.

A defence that was so solid last season has been beaten regularly at set-pieces, with 26 goals conceded in the first 15 league games (compared with 36 in 38 games last term), while Jamie Vardy's early-season form has also been a worry.

Missing...Jamie Vardy



Manchester City were the last English champions to be relegated, going down in 1938 while defending their league title.

Leicester could yet be saved by the poor form of struggling sides such as Swansea City and Hull City, but last year's miracle still has the potential to turn into a nightmare.

4 CAN INTER'S NEW CHINESE OWNERS BANISH THE CURSE?

So, what has gone wrong at Internazionale this time? At the start of December, they were not only 10th in Serie A, 15 points behind leaders Juventus and 11 points off the Champions League zone, but Dutch coach Frank De Boer, who was only appointed in August, had already been sacked.

Compounding their poor season were some dreadful performances in the Europa League. Drawn with Southampton, Sparta Prague and Hapoel Be'er Sheva in a seemingly straightforward group, Inter lost four of their first five games.

It is arguable that the current difficulties began in May 2010, in Madrid, when Inter won the Champions League/European Cup for a third time. That night, coach Jose Mourinho decided to jump ship, and since then, for a variety of different reasons, Inter have lost their way, especially with regard to their coaching appointments.

In the wake of the Portuguese, Rafa Benitez, Leonardo, Gian Piero Gasperini, Claudio Ranieri, Andrea Stramaccioni, Walter Mazzari and Roberto Mancini have all come, seen and failed to conquer.

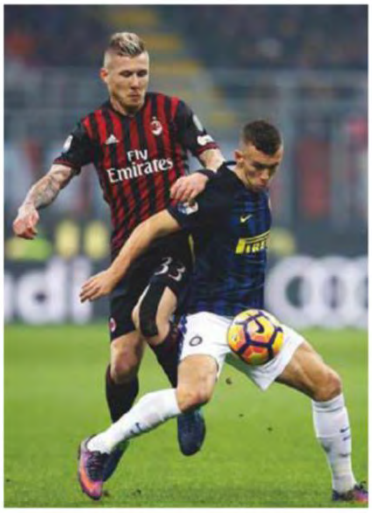
The latest lasted just 84 days, Inter finally running out of patience with De Boer after a 1-0 loss at Sampdoria – his seventh defeat in 14 official games.

De Boer's Inter rarely looked like a unit that knew what it wanted to do. Rather, his side tended to rely heavily on the individual brilliance of players such as Mauro Icardi, Ivan Perisic and Antonio Candreva. On the pitch, his side went from the sublime to the ridiculous, beating Juve 2-1 in Serie A but losing Europa League games to Sparta Prague and Hapoel Be'er Sheva.

Critics pointed to the folly of asking a Dutch coach, with no experience of Italian football, to take over a squad not of his own choosing just 12 days before the season started. And while they appreciated his disciplinary hard line, they were less impressed by his apparent indifference to tactical issues.

Derby...Inter's Ivan Perisic holds off Juraj Kucka of Milan

In the wake of De Boer's dismissal, it looked as if the club's Chinese and Indonesian ownership would opt for a prestige replacement, with Guus Hiddink and Laurent Blanc among those mentioned. Instead, they went for a safe pair of experienced Italian hands in former Lazio coach Stefano Pioli.



The new man's first game in charge was the derby with city rivals Milan, and his side made a good first impression in drawing 2-2, thanks to a 92nd-minute equaliser from Perisic in a game Inter dominated for long periods.

However, the relative euphoria prompted by that performance was immediately mitigated by a 3-2 defeat away at Hapoel Be'er Sheva in a game in which Inter had been 2-0 up at half-time.

Having bought a 70 per cent share in Inter for €270million in June, the Chinese electronics and digital TV giant Suning is expected to impact more in the future running of the club, but at the moment, it is not always clear who is calling the shots.

Is it the Suning boss Zhang Jindong? Is it Indonesian tycoon Erick Thohir, who now has a 30 per cent holding but who was the original Asian investor three years ago? Or is it Inter sports director, Piero Ausilio?

The problem is that, in all likelihood, all three (and others as well) have a say in the day-to-day running of Inter, and on the road from Milan to Nanjing wires can easily get crossed.

Take the idea that the club might try to sell Gabriel "Gabigol" Barbosa in the January transfer window. The 20-year-old ex-Santos striker was bought in late summer for €29m. Does it make any sense to spend that sort of money on a player, only to offload him a couple of months later? Especially, when you realise that he has only played once, in a 1-1 home draw against Bologna.

A certain confusion, mismanagement and overlapping of responsibilities is only logical for a huge "brand" like Inter, which has changed ownership three times in the last three years.

Observers close to the club remain convinced that Suning's interest and commitment has not been undermined by the poor seasonal start and that they are around for the long haul.

They point to the increasing involvement (and presence) of Zhang Jindong's 25-year-old son, Steven, in Inter affairs as an important statement of intent. American educated and someone who has worked for JP Morgan and Morgan Stanley, he may be well-equipped to deal with a western economic environment, but he may have a lot to learn about football.

One thing is clear though, and it is that the Suning interest in European football was further underlined in November when digital broadcaster PPTV, a video-streaming website owned by Suning Holdings, signed a three-year deal worth $700m with the Premier League.

The Premier League and the Inter investments also fit in with the aim of China's president, Xi Jinping, who is a well-known football fan, to transform this 1.3billion-strong nation into a soccer

Power-brokers...(from left) club president Erick Thohir, vice-president Javier Zanetti, Suning chairman Zhang Jindong, board member Stephen Zhang and CEO Michael Bolingbroke

superpower by 2050.

So while the future for Inter looks bright, in the short term they need some morale-boosting results and a couple of urgent personnel changes.

While Icardi, Perisic, Candreva, Marcelo Brozovic and Eder guarantee quality up front, the team lacks a defensive midfielder and a top-class defender to play alongside Miranda. Inter may have those players in their squad, in Ever Banega, Geoffrey Kondogbia and Jeison Murillo, but none are in form. One thing is for sure and that is Pioli will have to work some magic on his squad; magic more of the psychological than the tactical kind.

Suning's interest and commitment has not been undermined by the poor seasonal start and they are around for the long haul

Otherwise, long-time observers of Italian football will finally have to admit that Inter are a club condemned to live with a Faustian curse which grants it endless years of torment and failure, interspersed with short periods of intense success.

Maybe, the men from Asia will be able to banish the curse.

Paddy Agnew

Best...Colombia's Atletico Nacional lift the 2016 Libertadores Cup

5 HOW SUCCESSFUL WILL THE NEW LIBERTADORES CUP FORMAT BE?

South America's premier competition, the Libertadores Cup, will undergo major change in 2017, with an expanded format featuring 44 teams to be played between February and November.

In a move which acknowledged the region's key TV markets, there will be two extra spots for Brazil and one more apiece to Argentina, Colombia and Chile.

However, CONMEBOL reversed its initial decision to stage the Final as a single game in a neutral stadium and the tournament will now continue with the existing format of home and away legs in the stadiums of each finalist.

The changes prompted the Mexican federation to announce that Liga MX clubs will not participate in the 2017 Libertadores after competing by invitation in the last 19 editions. They will instead concentrate on the CONCACAF Champions League, a competition that Mexican teams have dominated.

There will also be changes to the Sudamericana Cup, which will now run from March until the beginning of December. Teams will no longer be able to qualify for both competitions.

At risk...migrant workers in Qatar

6 HOW WILL QATAR REACT TO FURTHER EVIDENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES?

Qatar, the 2022 World Cup hosts, will face further scrutiny of its controversial human-rights record over the coming months.

In March, the UN International Labour Organization will decide whether Qatar is doing enough to prevent forced labour. New legislation, aimed at reforming the Kafala system, has been introduced but Amnesty International has warned that the risk of abuse remains high for migrant workers, including those building World Cup stadiums and other key facilities.

Qatar has also been accused of censorship after Doha News, the country's only independent news website, was blocked by internet service providers.

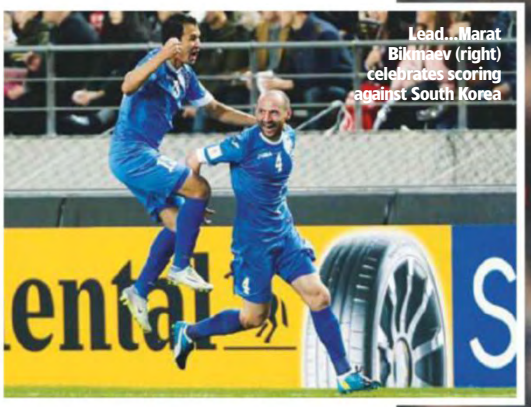
7 CAN UZBEKISTAN QUALIFY FOR A FIRST WORLD CUP?

It was all looking good for Uzbekistan at half-time on November 15 at Seoul World Cup Stadium. In the 25th minute, Marat Bikmaev had lobbed goalkeeper Kim Seung-gyu from outside the area in spectacular fashion and the Central Asians just needed to hold on to move five points clear of South Korea with five games left in the final round of 2018 World Cup qualifiers.

Unfortunately for the visitors, two second-half goals gave the hosts a 2-1 win and second spot in Group A, behind Iran, to leave Uzbekistan once again fretting about their chances of a first appearance at the World Cup.

They had seen it all before back in Tashkent as the national side, with the scent of the global stage in their nostrils, stumble just as it comes into sight.

When the former Soviet Union broke up, Uzbekistan quickly signalled their arrival as a new force on the continent by winning gold at the 1994 Asian Games. And though they didn't get too close in their attempts to qualify for the big event in 1998 and 2002, it was a different matter in 2006.



Lead...Marat Bikmaev (right) celebrates scoring against South Korea

The team made it to a two-legged play-off against Bahrain, with the winner facing Trinidad & Tobago for a place in Germany. Leading 1-0 in the home game, Uzbekistan star Server Djeparov scored a penalty to make it 2-0, only for referee Toshimitsu Yoshida to blow for encroachment.

Instead of signalling for a retake, the Japanese official awarded Bahrain an indirect free-kick. The game ended 1-0 with an incredulous Uzbekistan federation demanding a 3-0 forfeit victory. The team arrived in the Middle East for the second leg only to learn that FIFA had declared the first leg invalid, but they ordered a replay and not a forfeit.

Uzbekistan turned around and went home to be held to a 0-0 draw which was then followed by a loss in Bahrain in the second leg.

For Brazil 2014, Uzbekistan arrived in Seoul for the penultimate qualifier level on points with the hosts, but a cautious approach and an own goal cost them. Even so, they almost overcame Korea's goal difference advantage in the final game, but a 5-1 win over Qatar was too little too late. And that was followed by a surprise loss to Jordan in the play-offs.

All of this has added to the suspicion that while Uzbekistan have the talent, perhaps they need to change their mentality in order to make the jump from continental contender to regional powerhouse. Another crucial defeat to South Korea, this time at the 2015 Asian Cup quarter-finals, seemed to offer more evidence, and it remains to be seen if the road to Russia will be any different.

The current team has a pleasing blend of veterans, players at their peak and exciting young talent.

The 2006 campaign veteran Djeparov is still there in midfield, along with striker Alexander Geynrikh. Odil Ahmedov, who is based in Russia, is the midfield linchpin and was linked with Arsenal after a fine showing at the 2011 Asian Cup. Meanwhile, Vitaliy Denisov of Lokomotiv Moscow – Russia has been the traditional overseas call for Uzbeks but the Middle East and China is starting to become interested – has been one of Asia's top right-backs for years.

Striker Igor Sergeev, 23, has been snapped up by Beijing Guoan and has many admirers further afield, while the younger Eidor Shomurodov is likely to be the next Uzbek star to move overseas. Along with the highly rated Sardor Rashidov in midfield, there is a strong

Brave...Uzbek keeper Aleksandr Lobanov keeps out Koo Ja-cheol of South Korea

spine to the Uzbek's side.

With a top-two spot in their group good enough for an automatic berth in Russia, Uzbekistan made a good start to the final round of qualifiers under coach Samvel Babayan. Three wins from their first four games, with just a narrow loss to Iran, put them in a good position before the trip to Seoul and an uncertain Korean team.

But although an opportunity to beat one of Asia's elite in a big game was spurned, there is still much to play for.

Uzbekistan are a point behind South Korea and two behind Iran, while there are five games left for them to overcome recent history and reach the World Cup for the first time.

John Duerden

Star...Uzbekistan's Server Djeparov has been Asia's player of the year twice

8 CAN ATLETICO ADAPT TO A STADIUM CALLED WANDA?

Atletico Madrid will leave the Vicente Calderon, their home for the last 50 years, and move into a new 67,000-capacity stadium in the north-east of the Spanish capital in August.

The new stadium will be known as the Wanda Metropolitano, and will be sponsored by the Chinese property company Dalian Wanda Group, who purchased a 20 per cent stake in Atletico in 2015.

The name is also a reference to the club's first real stadium, the Metropolitano, where they first played in La Liga games before moving to the Vicente Calderon in the south of the city in 1966.

Moving... Atletico president Enrique Cerezo

9 WHO WILL TRIUMPH AT THE WOMEN'S EURO 2017?

The 17th European Women's Championship will take place in Holland between July 16 and August 6.

Defending champions Germany, seeking a seventh successive title, have been drawn in Group B with Sweden – the team they beat to win Olympic gold in Rio – along with Italy and Russia.

Hosts Holland open their Group A campaign against Norway, the runners-up to Germany in 2013, before facing Denmark and Belgium.

France are the favourites to emerge form Group C, where they face Iceland, Austria and Switzerland. England and Scotland are drawn together in Group D, with Spain and Portugal.

Determined...England's Jo Potter (centre) in action in a friendly against France

10

CAN ALTACH UPSET THE ODDS?

It is increasingly rare for outsiders to break the dreary predictability of domestic club football in Europe, and even when it does happen it is usually with the aid of big-money backers.

Austria has been no exception, with Red Bull Salzburg, generously financed by the energy-drinks manufacturer, walking off with the league title in seven of the last 10 seasons.

But this term the Austrian Bundesliga has witnessed a rare case of romance.

Rheindorf Altach, a team based in a sleepy village near the Alpine border, have thrown down the gauntlet to Salzburg and were two points clear at the top as the championship entered its second half.

At one point Altach enjoyed a nine-match unbeaten run, which included a 5-1 drubbing of Austria Vienna and a goalless draw against Salzburg – which was a remarkable achievement considering the financial resources of the two clubs.

This is certainly not a case of a club that has been pumped on financial steroids as Altach have an annual budget of just €6million and did not spend anything on transfers during the close season.

> **"We have a good team, with the right balance between young, old, experienced and new, but it is also true we have to rediscover ourselves week in, week out"**
>
> Altach sporting director, Georg Zellhofer

It is not entirely new for village teams to establish themselves in the Austrian top flight, which has been turned upside down since the arrival of Red Bull. While traditional teams such as Rapid Vienna, Austria Vienna and Sturm Graz have been left standing and unsure how to react to Salzburg's dominance of the domestic game, smaller clubs have done relatively well – although without ever threatening to actually win a title.

Among those to have had their day in the sun are SV Ried – from Ried Im Innkries, which has a population of 11,000 – who regularly finished in mid-table and have played in the Europa League. Then there is Mattersburg, from a town of just 7,000 inhabitants, who finished third in 2006 and also qualified for the old UEFA Cup. They were subsequently relegated but returned to the top flight last season.

There was also the rise and fall of Grodig, who finished third in 2014 but have since been relegated and then dropped into the third tier due to financial problems.

Altach are the smallest of the lot, however, and their unromantically named Cashpoint Arena home, following recent improvements, now holds 8,900 and is therefore able to accommodate the village's entire population with nearly 3,000 spaces to spare.

Having yo-yoed between the third and second tiers, Altach first reached the top flight in 2006 and survived for three seasons. They returned in 2014 and, incredibly, finished third to qualify for the Europa League, where they lost 1-0 on aggregate to Belenenses in the play-off round.

Loyal...Philipp Netzer (left) has been with Altach since 2009

Last season was a struggle as they finished eighth but this season has gone better than ever.

Their success has come at a price, though, as coach Damir Canadi left in November to take over at Rapid Vienna when the 32-times champions sacked Mike Buskens after only six months in charge.

Canadi, who had been at Altach since January 2013 and led them out of the second division, is regarded as one of the country's most astute coaches, and his place has been taken, initially on an interim basis, by Werner Grabherr, who at 31 is the youngest boss in the top flight. The former Altach player had previously been working as the club's marketing manager.

Rather than lavish spending by foreign owners, Altach's success has been based on sustainable management and intelligent squad building.

Their home stadium, traditionally known as the Schnabelholz, has been expanded over the years to bring it up to Bundesliga standards without breaking the bank.

With sporting director Georg Zellhofer working quietly in the background, Canadi and his successor Grabherr have managed to mould a team mainly out of journeyman professionals, many of whom joined the club when they were still in the second tier.

Those include keeper Andreas Lukse, defenders Benedict Zech, Andreas Lienhart

Power...Altach's Luca Galvao (in white) beats Philipp Huspek of Sturm Graz

and Emanuel Schreiner, midfielders Philipp Netzer and Boris Prokopic, and Cameroonian forward Louis Ngwat-Mahop.

Ngwat-Mahop actually made a single, two-minute appearance for Bayern Munich early in his career but confusion over an allegedly fake French passport prompted the Bavarians to offload him.

The only major additions to the squad in the summer were winger Nikola Dovedan on loan from Linz and Swiss under-19 international Dmitri Oberlin from Salzburg. Both have flourished, scoring 15 goals between them in the first 19 games.

"The realistic assessment shows that we have a good team, with the right balance between young, old, experienced and new," says Zellhofer. "But, it is also true, we have to rediscover ourselves week in, week out."

The question is whether Altach can keep it up. Sadly, the dynamics of European football would suggest not and the way in which Rapid poached Canadi is probably a foretaste of what will happen to their top players in the summer.

Brian Homewood

Shock...RB Leipzig beat Schalke as keeper Ralf Fahrmann fails to prevent Sead Kolasinac's own goal

11 CAN PROMOTED RB LEIPZIG PULL OFF THE BIGGEST UPSET IN THE HISTORY OF THE BUNDESLIGA?

The newly promoted club, who are controversially backed by the finances of drinks manufacturer Red Bull and coached by the mercurial Ralph Hasenhuettl, took the Bundesliga by storm in the first half of the campaign.

Now the young side – whose main talents include striker Timo Werner, and midfelders Naby Keita and Emil Forsberg – face the challenge of trying to emulate Kaiserslautern, who won the 1998 title a year after being promoted from Bundesliga 2.

How Leipzig react to their first league defeat of the season – 1-0 to Ingolstadt in early December – will give an indication of whether they can see off the challenge of defending champions Bayern Munich in the spring.

Future stars...Argentina win the 2015 South American Under-20 title

12 WHO WILL STAR AT THE SOUTH AMERICAN UNDER-20 CHAMPIONSHIP?

Lionel Messi (2005), Edinson Cavani (2007) and Neymar (2011) are just some of the names to have emerged from the 10-nation, biennial continental tournament that acts as a showcase for South American talent.

Ecuador are the hosts for the 2017 competition, which runs from January 18 to February 11.

13 CAN FEYENOORD LAND THEIR FIRST TITLE SINCE 1999?

"You aren't a Feyenoord fan for fun," Gerard Cox always says. And the 76-year-old Rotterdam actor knows what he is talking about. On the south bank of the river Maas there have been many more moments of disappointment than glory. But, at the same time, the expectations of Holland's most loyal fan base are irrationally sky high at the start of every new season.

True, Feyenoord were the last Dutch club to gain a European prize, winning the UEFA Cup in 2002, but they have been waiting for their 15th national title since 1999. As a comparison, rivals Ajax (a total of 33) and PSV (23) have been champions six and nine times respectively during this period of drought.

But this time it might be different. Feyenoord have been on top of the Eredivisie since day one of the 2016-17 season and have a much better balanced squad than in recent times.

The secret behind the Rotterdam club's success this term has been an ability to keep their squad together over the summer. And they not only have a solid side, they also have the necessary knowhow.

Players such as Eljero Elia and Dirk Kuyt have World Cup experience under their belts, while 31-year-old midfielder Karim El Ahmadi is playing the best football of his career. Industrious midfielders Jens Toornstra and Tonny Vilhena have rediscovered their best form, while overlapping right-back Rick Karsdorp recently made his international debut for Holland.

On top of that, technical director Martin Van Geel pulled off some shrewd transfers, especially up front. Steven Berghuis, a winger on loan from Watford, and striker Nicolai Jorgensen, signed from Copenhagen, have been valuable additions, giving the team more attacking options.

The strength of the squad is such that a serious achilles injury to goalkeeper Kenneth Vermeer has been no more than a minor hiccup. By signing former Liverpool keeper Brad Jones they have a reliable replacement, who may keep his place even when Vermeer is back.

Even rookie coach Giovanni Van Bronckhorst has learned a trick or two. Last year Feyenoord threw away any title chance they had with a run of nine games without a win, including seven defeats, right after the winter break. In came veteran Dick Advocaat to give the former Arsenal, Rangers and Barcelona midfielder some much needed advice, and this year Van Bronckhorst has led his side so well that the board have renewed his contract.

But the big question is, can Feyenoord remain on top?

Of course, a run like last term's would be fatal, but even a handful of defeats might be something to worry about. Although Ajax had a miserable start to the season, and PSV are out of form and struggling against the minnows, neither are too far behind.

And then there is the concern that the African Nations Cup in January could also put things in jeopardy. Feyenoord can't afford to lose their main man El Ahmadi to Morocco as replacements Marko Vejinovic and Renato Tapia have not convinced. However, Ajax will face the same problem with Moroccan midfielder Hakim Ziyech, whose late transfer from Twente is the main reason that the Amsterdam club are back on track.

So it remains to be seen whether player absences, a dip of form or defensive errors – Feyenoord's major weakness – could yet

Showdown... Feyenoord celebrate scoring against PSV

> "Indirectly, U2 could contribute to a new title"
> Feyenoord chairman Gerard Hoetmer

Loyal...Feyenoord have a big fan base

decide the championship.

In fact, it appears that the movers and shakers at Feyenoord feel it is safer to put their money on title wins in the distant future. By 2022, a new 63,000-capacity stadium should have been built, designed by famous architect Rem Koolhaas. The new football temple will cost €356million and will be situated near to De Kuip and partly built in the river Maas – if the city council agree, that is. Two previous plans and the fans' favourite option to renovate De Kuip all fell through because of lack of cash.

This time, the stadium is part of a "Feyenoord City" plan, consisting of houses, restaurants, hotels, a cinema and sports facilities. And many expect this investment to help Feyenoord catch up with PSV and Ajax.

"The squad's budget will rise because a part of the revenue from pop concerts will go to the club," chairman Gerard Hoetmer told Algemeen Dagblad. "So indirectly U2 could contribute to a new title."

Let's hope for Cox and his fellow devotees that Feyenoord finally have found what they are looking for.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Hope...are Feyenoord finally in line for a long-awaited title?

Cashing out... Silvio Berlusconi

14 WILL MILAN FINALLY BE SOLD TO THE CHINESE?

In August 2016, it was announced that Silvio Berlusconi had agreed to sell Milan, the club he has owned for 30 years, to a consortium of Chinese investors.

It followed a year of negotiations with at least three different China-based groups when at times it seemed that the 79-year-old Berlusconi was reluctant to sell.

A purpose-created company called Sino-Europe Sports (SES) agreed to pay €740million, a price that included picking up the tab for €220m of debt.

But in December it was announced the deal had been delayed until March 2017. SES were reported to have paid a second tranche of €100m to a holding company owned by Berlusconi.

It had been expected that the deal would be closed by December 13, but the consortium – backed by Haixia Capital and entrepreneur Yonghong Li, was struggling to get the Chinese government's approval.

15 IS THE BALANCE OF POWER SHIFTING IN MOSCOW?

It's been all change in the Russian capital. Spartak Moscow ended 2016 top of the Premier League after a dramatic change in fortune under coach Massimo Carrera.

Former assistant to Antonio Conte with Juventus and Italy, the Italian became Spartak's caretaker boss in August when Dmitri Alenichev resigned following an embarrassing defeat in the Europa qualifiers to Cypriot side AEK Larnaca.

Carrera now has a permanent deal and a 3-1 victory over CSKA prompted fans to start dreaming of a first title since 2001.

Meanwhile, CSKA boss Leonid Slutsky stepped down after overseeing one of the most illustrious periods in the club's history, while Dynamo face an uncertain future after the VTB Bank withdrew support.

John Holmesdale

Derby days...CSKA (left) and Spartak

High flier...Zulte Waregem's Timothy Derijck beats Michiel Jonckheere of Oostende

16 CAN FRANCKY DURY CONTINUE TO WORK WONDERS AT ZULTE WAREGEM?

Anderlecht, Club Brugge and Standard Liege are names that spring to mind when Belgian teams are up for discussion. Surprising, then, that at the halfway stage of the "classic" season, Zulte Waregem were autumn champions, five points clear of the chasing pack.

Although Waregem's fans have fond memories of reaching the UEFA Cup semi-final 30 years ago, Zulte Waregem were only formed in 2001 – the result of financial problems at KSV Waregem and their resulting takeover of a much smaller club, Zultse VV.

The "Essevee", as they are known, were first noticed outside of Belgium in the 2012-13 season when they almost won the national league with a team that contained Thorgan Hazard, who, is now with Borussia Monchengladbach, and a teenage Junior Malanda, who was killed in a high-speed car crash, aged 20, while with Wolfsburg.

Since those days, Zulte Waregem have enlarged their ground capacity to 11,500 and increased an annual budget from €9million to €13m. That wouldn't buy a decent striker in today's market, but coach and ex-policeman Francky Dury has worked wonders since arriving in Waregem in the early 1990s.

With the club in their amateur days, Dury has been there more or less ever

Shrewd... Zulte Waregem's Francky Dury

since, and his hallmark is to build teams that blend youth and experience, without star names.

This season, he has opted for a 4-5-1 formation, with Mbaye Leye as a loan striker. In his third spell at the club, Leye has scored more than 70 goals in just over 150 appearances, although much of the side's early-season success was down to a settled back four, with Lukas Lerager and Soualiho Meite patrolling the midfield.

Lerager joined from Danish club Viborg in the close season and has been a revelation as a box-to box midfielder. As for Meite, he joined Zulte Waregem in the January 2016 transfer window on loan from Lille. Sitting in front of the back four, he has been one of the best players in the league this season.

Zulte Waregem have an option to buy Meite for €300,000 but he could well leave the club shortly after that purchase and, as part of the loan terms, they would only receive 30 per cent of the profits from any sell-on deal.

Experience has also been a factor, with only Meite and Lerager of the regular line-up being under 25, while 30-year-old attacking midfielder Onur Kaya has been a key supply line.

Their annual budget wouldn't buy a decent striker in today's market

However, it's early days in a domestic league that only gets down and dirty when the play-offs begin in May.

In the last three seasons, the club crowned autumn champions has failed to win the title, with Anderlecht in 2013 the last club to achieve the feat.

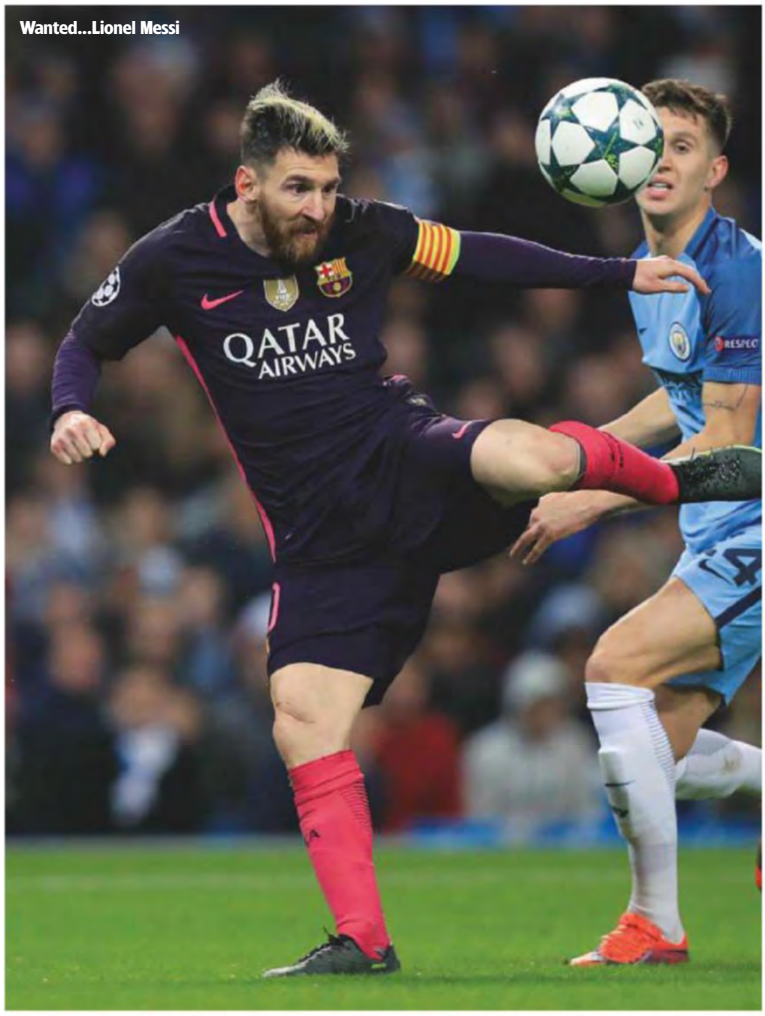
John Chapman

17 WILL LIONEL MESSI SIGN A NEW DEAL WITH BARCELONA?

The Argentinian star's current contract expires in 2018 and Barcelona are keen to tie him to a new deal.

However, Messi, who turns 30 in June, has yet to commit to the offer from Barca, believed to be in the region of €35million a year, after tax.

Waiting in the wings are Manchester City and, if reports in Spain are to be believed, Chinese Super League club Hebei China Fortune, who are prepared to offer Messi €500m, after tax, over five years.



Wanted...Lionel Messi

18 WHAT WILL WE LEARN FROM THE CONFEDERATIONS CUP IN RUSSIA?

The recent Russian doping scandal highlighted the role of Vitaly Mutko, the Russian deputy prime minister who is overseeing preparations for the 2018 World Cup and standing for re-election from UEFA to the FIFA Council.

The World Anti-Doping Agency report, from Canadian law professor Richard McLaren found widespread doping in Russian sport and prompted calls for the World Cup to be removed from Russia – which, of course, will not happen.

Only days before McLaren reported, the great and the good of world football were undertaking the draw for the Confederations Cup in Russia next summer, which will act as a dry run for the full World Cup 12 months later. Euro 2016 champions Portugal were drawn in a group with Mexico, New Zealand and 2018 World Cup hosts Russia.

Meanwhile, world champions Germany take on Copa America winners Chile, Australia and the team that wins the African Nations Cup.

Matches will take place in Moscow, St Petersburg, Kazan and Sochi.

Russia play Portugal in the opening game on June 17, with the Final on July 2, both in St Petersburg.

Confederations draw...the show will go on

Disgraced...Sepp Blatter (left) and Michel Platini

19 WILL SEPP BLATTER GO TO JAIL?

The chaffeur-driven Mercedes, one of the last FIFA perks enjoyed by Sepp Blatter, is no more. The disgraced ex-president was forced to return the car before Christmas following his failed appeal to the Committee of Arbitration for Sport.

Blatter had appealed against his six-year – originally eight-year – ban from football for an unexplained payment to Michel Platini, and the sale of World Cup television rights. He approved a SwFr2million payment to then-UEFA president Platini in 2011 and is also alleged to have signed off the Caribbean Football Union rights for the 2010 and 2014 World Cups to disgraced former FIFA executive Jack Warner, who then made an estimated £11m profit when he sold the rights on.

"I have experienced much in my 41 years in FIFA," Blatter said in a statement after the verdict. "I mostly learned that you can win in sport, but you can also

lose. Nevertheless I look back with gratitude to all the years in which I was able to realise my ideals for football and serve FIFA."

In a wide-ranging interview with the BBC World Service, the 80-year-old also complained that his replacement at FIFA, Gianni Infantino, was not returning his calls.

"I have never seen in any company that the new president... was not paying respect to the old president," Blatter said.

> "I look back with gratitude to all the years in which I was able to realise my ideals for football and serve FIFA"
>
> Sepp Blatter

"After his election we had a very good contact and he stopped at my house and we had a chat. I told him I have a list of questions that should be solved in FIFA which has not been solved before.

"I have asked him, I have sent him a letter and I have his personal number and I was told that it's still correct. Never, never an answer. Never.

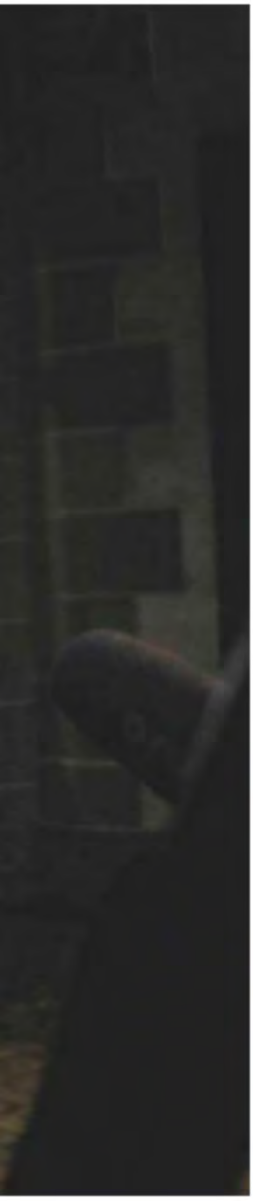
"I still have this list, so now we speak only with lawyers."

Blatter's problems are far from over. He may now appeal on a point of law to the Swiss Federal Court – following the example of Platini, whose appeal against his four-year ban will be heard in 2017 – but Blatter is not clear of FIFA ethics action, or action from the Swiss authorities.

He faces a further FIFA ethics investigation over alleged bribery and self-dealing in his contract, plus the employment deals of his sacked former secretary-general Jerome Valcke and finance director Markus Kattner.

Blatter received a SwFr12m bonus after the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and would have been due another SwFr12m for completing his 2015-19 presidential term, the contracts revealed.

And he still faces a Swiss criminal investigation over the payment to Platini and it will become apparent in early 2017 whether prosecutors have enough evidence to bring a charge against Blatter.



Loser...Blatter after his appeal

Edge...Spain (in red) and Italy

20 COULD SPAIN, ITALY OR PORTUGAL MISS THE 2018 WORLD CUP?

European champions Portugal face a battle to qualify automatically for the 2018 World Cup in Russia after losing their opening qualifying game to Switzerland, who now lead their group by three points.

In that group's final round of games on October 10, Portugal host Switzerland in what is highly likely to prove decisive in whether Portugal will be forced to take part in the play-offs.

Elsewhere in the European qualifiers, Spain and Italy are battling it out in Group G, with only one of the two guaranteed automatic qualification.

Spain currently have the edge on goal difference after the two teams drew 1-1 in Turin last October. On September 2, Spain host Italy in what could prove to be the crucial game of the group.

China deal...Oscar

21 WILL A CHINESE SUPER LEAGUE CLUB BREAK THE WORLD TRANSFER RECORD?

Brazilian midfielder Oscar has become the latest high-profile name to move to the Chinese Super League, with a proposed £60million transfer to Shanghai SIPG from Chelsea close to completion.

Oscar's fee was set to eclipse the Chinese league's previous record of £48m which was paid by Shanghai SIPG to Zenit for another Brazilian, forward Hulk.

Will the record go even higher in 2017?

22 WILL VALENCIA BE RELEGATED?

Gary Neville might have been beaten 7-0 at Camp Nou last season, but those who thought his departure as Valencia boss was a solution – and, in fairness, there weren't many of them – have proven predictably mistaken.

What was not predictable was that things would be quite this bad.

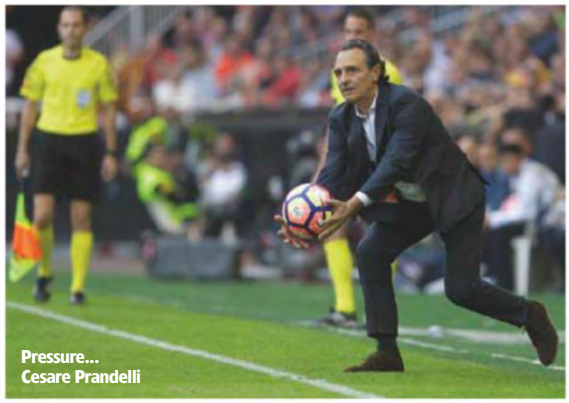
In September, Valencia went bottom of La Liga, after losing three games in a row, while Pako Ayestaran's dismissal was the latest in a series of coaching changes since the club's owner, Singaporean businessman Peter Lim, took over in 2014.

Voro took over as caretaker for a fourth time in his career while the club searched for a new coach, but even though his 11-game win-record is better than anyone else in the club's history, he had no intention of seeking the position full-time.

"Thanks Voro, our Mr Wolf," read a banner at Mestalla as he took charge for the last time, and he departed with the words: "I hope I never appear here again."

Eventually the club settled on former Italy coach Cesare Prandelli and when formally presented to the media he said of his new job: "The aim? To make this a real team."

Valencia's sporting director Suso Garcia Pitarch insisted Prandelli had always been the club's first choice, even though they had petitioned to change competition rules so they could sign Marcelino, whose early season spell with Villarreal contravened Liga rules stating that you can't take charge of two teams in a season.



Pressure... Cesare Prandelli

Prandelli won his first game in charge, triumphing 2-1 at Sporting Gijon thanks to two goals from midfielder Mario Suarez – who in one game had managed to get on the scoresheet as many times as he had in the last four years put together.

That win pulled Valencia out of the relegation zone and straight afterwards Prandelli was asked by the media if the team could qualify for the Champions League. And they say that the club's supporters are demanding...

By the middle of December, Valencia had almost slipped back in the drop zone. A 3-2 defeat at Real Sociedad left the six-times champions outside the relegation places on goal difference and Prandelli was summoned over to Singapore to explain the performance.

The club's fans have turned against Lim and his family, and when the owner's daughter Kim was spotted at Manchester United's game against Arsenal, rather than at Mestalla where Valencia were playing Granada, it didn't go down well. Especially when their team performed poorly, again. Mestalla whistled and some even chanted for Peter Lim to leave. Others took to Kim Lim's Instagram account to complain, many of them in pretty unpleasant terms.

"Some fans are mad and stupid if they think they can control me," she hit back. "Open your eyes and your brains...maybe it's your know-it-all attitude that is the reason the club is like it is...the fact is, we're still the owners of the club."

Valencia's problems run deep. And yet the results are something of a mystery. They really haven't played badly enough to have lost so many games this season – nine league defeats by the middle of December. In fact, they have been good at times, only to waste chance after chance and then watch their defenders shoot themselves in the foot.

Looking at their starting XI, they have a good side. What they don't have is that something that is hard to define. A little luck, perhaps. Or something deeper?

Maybe it's time to look elsewhere for someone to blame?

Sid Lowe

Falling...Valencia's Joao Cancelo is brought down by Lucas Digne of Barcelona

Dream...the plan for a football stadium at the Port of Miami

23 CAN DAVID BECKHAM'S MIAMI GROUP FIND A STADIUM SITE?

It is almost 1,000 days since David Beckham announced plans to launch his MLS team in Miami, but the progress of his group – with pop impresario Simon Fuller and entrepreneur Marcelo Claure as his partners – has been stalled by the failure to find a stadium, or even a site on which to build one.

After failing to find a site in Port Miami, downtown Miami and the Marlins Park area, Miami United finally secured a site in the neighbourhood of Overtown.

Yet by the end of 2016 it remained to be seen whether the group had agreed the finances needed to complete the purchase and fund the stadium construction.

Opportunity..China (red) take on Qatar

24 WILL FIFA OPT TO EXPAND THE WORLD CUP TO 48 TEAMS?

The FIFA Council, which meets on January 9, will consider three proposals on the expansion of the World Cup in 2026: to keep the status quo of 32 teams; to expand it to 40 teams; or to expand to 48 teams.

Gianni Infantino, who made promises to African and Asian countries during the 2016 presidential election, favours the latter option, with the possibility of 16 three-team groups, with the top two in each group progressing to a 32-team knockout round.

If the decision to have 48 teams is taken, where to hold an expanded World Cup will become a hot topic. China, one of few with the finances to accommodate a 48-team event, will be a candidate.

Gesture... Aleksander Ceferin

25 WHO WILL LAUNCH BIDS TO HOST EURO 2024?

March 2017 is the deadline for countries to express official interest in hosting the 2024 European Championship, with the decision to be taken in late 2018.

Bids are likely from Germany, and a combined Scandinavian campaign from Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

Germany will be a strong candidate after leaving England free to bid for the Euro 2020 Final and semis. But the Scandinavians backed Aleksander Ceferin in the UEFA presidential election and will hope to gain some political capital from that gesture.

All to play for in ANC

Senegal head the list of contenders for the 2017 African Nations Cup in Gabon. Mark Gleeson sets the scene

The top-ranked team in Africa are among the list of those in the field for the finals of the 2017 African Nations Cup who have yet to win the trophy.

Senegal came desperately close in 2002, when they lost on post-match penalties to Cameroon, but they have not been back to a Final since and will be hoping that a strong squad of attacking players will give them a decent crack at honours some 15 years later.

Their place as the best African side in the FIFA rankings at the end of 2016 puts them among the favourites for the tournament in Gabon, although this is a competition that has a myriad of potential candidates for the winners' podium come the first weekend of February.

Half of the 2017 field have won the tournament previously and they are headed by Egypt (seven times), Cameroon and Ghana (four each), and Ivory Coast and Democratic Republic of Congo (twice). The north African trio of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have each had a single success previously and all will have high hopes again this time round.

Morocco look to have as much, if not more, potential as Senegal and they will be hoping for the Midas touch from French coach Herve Renard, who has been in charge of two of the last three title-winning teams.

Renard's first was Zambia in 2012 and he then led the Ivorians to a narrow penalty shoot-out win over Ghana in the last Final, in Equatorial Guinea, overcoming a difficult time trying to galvanise the disparate forceful personalities in the Ivorian team.

Host threat...Gabon's Andre Biyogo Poko takes on Ivory Coast

With Morocco, his task will be to bring a killer touch to a side that can dominate with their skill and guile, but all too often fall short of expectation. There is, however, every possibility that Renard could further entrench his place among the legends of African football this time round.

Morocco are in the same group as Renard's old team, Ivory Coast, and the pair also square off in the World Cup qualifiers. The teams drew 0-0 in Morocco in November.

Ivory Coast must make do without Yaya Toure (retired) and Gervinho (injured), but Renard's successor Michel Dussuyer has begun to forge a new-look side whose positive performances in recent months suggest that the Elephants will offer a stout defence of their title.

Egypt, with Hector Cuper in charge, return to the tournament after missing the last three Nations Cups. Failure to qualify came amid the social and political turmoil in the country, which is now firmly suppressed, though the game remains in a much-weakened state. Egypt's last finals appearance, in 2010, marked an unprecedented third successive triumph.

> Half of the 2017 field have won the tournament previously

Group rivals Ghana have reached the last four of every Nations Cup since 2008 without adding to their four previous titles, the last of which was won in 1982.

In 2010 and 2015 they were runners-up, beaten narrowly on both occasions. They will likely once more have a decent shot at a place in the last four but will need a change in form if they are to win.

The tournament will be played against a

Contender... Senegal's Keita Balde (right)

backdrop of tension in Gabon following September's presidential elections, in which Ali Bongo retained power despite claims of widespread fraud. The Bongo family have been in power for almost half a century and are accused of helping themselves to billions over the years.

Amid the squandering was the €2million paid to Lionel Messi to come and be chauffeured by Bongo while the pair visited the new stadium in Port Gentil, which is one of four venues for the finals. A 20,000-seater stadium in Oyem was only finished in early December but the other two venues in Franceville and the capital Libreville, which will host the opening games and Final, were built for the 2012 finals, which Gabon co-hosted with Equatorial Guinea.

Missing again from the finals are Nigeria, who were eliminated by Egypt. That precipitated a change of coach, with new boss Gernot Rohr turning around their fortunes and putting the Super Eagles firmly in contention for a place at the World Cup finals. Had they been in the Nations Cup field, they would have been among the favourites. WS

Hands on heart... Gabon fans

Form...Herve Renard (right) has won two of the last three finals

GROUP A

BURKINA FASO

Burkina Faso needed a goal some 11 minutes into stoppage time to book their place in the finals in one of several incidents in recent African qualifying tournaments that cast further suspicion on the impartiality and scruples of match officials.

Best...Jonathan Pitroipa (no11)

That goal meant *Les Etalons* will now have been in 10 of the last 12 finals – a consistency matched only by their failure to get past the group phase in all but two of them: in the 1998 finals, when they were hosts and finished fourth, and 2013 when they reached the Final.

The bulk of that squad returns four years on, giving the Burkinabe every chance of advancing to the last eight.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Charles Kabore anchors the midfield, Bertrand Traore played in the 2012 finals aged 16 and Jonathan Pitroipa was voted player of the tournament in 2013.

▼ THE COACH

Paulo Duarte is in his second spell as coach of Burkina Faso, having led Gabon at the last finals. The 47-year-old has also coached clubs in his Portuguese homeland, France and Tunisia.

Probable line-up Daouda Diakite; Wilfried Balima, Bakary Kone, Issoufou Dayo, Patrick Malo; Prejuce Nakoulma, Charles Kabore, Abdou Traore, Jonathan Pitroipa; Alain Traore, Bertrand Traore

GABON

The hosts will be hoping they can lift some of the political tension in their oil-rich home after September's election, in which incumbent president Ali Bongo allegedly stole the result from a victorious opposition to extend his family's long hold on power and the petroleum revenues.

High hopes... Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang

There followed rioting and other incidents of civil disobedience and, if the home team do not perform, the likelihood is of more incidents.

Hopes rest largely on Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, and the suggestion that *Les Pantheres* are not much more than a one-man team does have credence.

A change of coach close to kick-off has not helped their cause.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, of course, along with midfielder Didier N'dong and keeper **Didier Ovono**, who will be competing in his fourth finals.

▼ THE COACH

Jose Antonio Camacho signed up just 45 days before the Nations Cup kicks off. A Real Madrid legend, he is a former manager of Spain and China but has no previous experience in Africa.

Probable line-up Didier Ovono; Lloyd Palun, Aaron Appindangoye, Bruno Ecuele Manga, Johann Obiang; Andre Biyogo Poko, Didier N'dong, Levy Madinda, Mario Lemina; Malick Evouna, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang

GUINEA-BISSAU

Arguably the weakest team ever to qualify for the finals, one of the world's poorest countries booked their place in Gabon at the expense of two previous winners: Zambia (2012) and Congo (1973).

Challenge... taking on Kenya

PHOTO CREDIT: WWW.SOKA.CO.KE

It was a fairy-tale qualification, though it had much to do with the poor performances of the opposition and qualification was sewn up before the campaign was complete.

The country's FA have hardly any money, which meant they failed to organise any friendlies in the October and November international windows to warm-up.

The vast majority of Guinea-Bissau's squad play their club football in Portugal.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Captain **Bocundji Ca** was born in Biombo but grew up in France, Emmanuel Mendy was born in Senegal and raised in Spain, while Zezinho began his career at Sporting in Portugal.

▼ THE COACH

Baciro Cande took charge after the first qualifier when Guinea-Bissau's Portuguese coach Paulo Torres was given a lengthy ban for insulting a referee.

Probable line-up Jonas Mendes; Emmanuel Mendy, Eridson, Rudinilson, Mamadu; Idrissa Camara, Bocundji Ca, Cafu, Zezinho; Cicero, Frederic Mendy

CAMEROON

The last of the four Nations Cup titles won by the Indomitable Lions was 15 years ago and they failed to qualify for two of the last three African championships.

Goal...celebrating against France

Gone is the influence of Samuel Eto'o, and the administrative foibles around the team means the likes of Alex Song and Joel Matip are no longer interested in playing for the national side either.

Hugo Broos has met with both players to try to engineer a change of heart but without luck to date.

Cameroon came through the qualifying campaign without losing a game, beating the minnows in their group and drawing twice with South Africa to qualify for a 19th Nations Cup tournament.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Still only 24, this is **Vincent Aboubakar**'s seventh year in the side. Benjamin Moukandjo returns from injury while Nicolas Nkoulou is back in form.

▼ THE COACH

The appointment of **Hugo Broos** did not sit well last February, mainly because most fans had never heard of the Belgian, who has overhauled the side considerably since taking charge.

Probable line-up Fabrice Ondoa; Allan Nyom, Nicolas Nkoulou, Aurelin Chedjou, Henri Bedimo; Edgar Salli, Sebastien Siani, Benjamin Moukandjo, Clinton Njie; Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting, Vincent Aboubakar

ALGERIA

Dominant...Carl Medjani

Since reaching the second round at the World Cup in Brazil, Algeria have looked to become a dominant force again on the continent, even if they underwhelmed with a quarter-final exit at the 2015 Nations Cup.

They breezed through to the 2017 finals, winning five and drawing one of their six qualifiers, but coach Christian Gourcuff could not resist the lure of returning to Ligue 1 and left in April.

Since then, Algeria have hired and fired Milovan Rajevac and appointed George Leekens.

Their 2018 World Cup qualification hopes have receded dramatically and confidence is low as they head to Gabon.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

El Arabi Hillel Soudani was top scorer in the qualifiers but could struggle to start, while the form of **Riyad Mahrez** is a worry. Nabil Bentaleb has been rejuvenated at Schalke.

▼ THE COACH

George Leekens took Tunisia to the quarter-finals at the last Nations Cup and has twice been coach of his native Belgium, including at the 1998 World Cup finals in France.

Probable line-up Rais M'bolhi; Mohamed Khoutir Ziti, Aissa Mandi, Carl Medjani, Faouzi Ghoulam; Saphir Taider, Nabil Bentaleb, Sofiane Feghouli; Riyad Mahrez, Islam Slimani, Yacine Brahimi

SENEGAL

Support... Senegal fans

Senegal have arrived at recent Nations Cup tournaments with much promise and potential before failing dismally despite a phalanx of stars in their squad.

They are again among the form teams, particularly after amassing a 100 per cent record in the qualifiers, albeit against lightweight opposition in an easy group.

An impressive squad on paper has yet to translate into tangible success and they still remain without a major title, having been finalists at the 2002 Nations Cup before reaching the quarter-finals of the World Cup in Japan and South Korea the same year.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Kalidou Koulibaly chose Senegal over France, **Sadio Mane** is the most expensive African player ever, and Cheikhou Kouyate is part of a dynamic midfield trio.

▼ THE COACH

Captain of Senegal's dream team in 2002 and fast-tracked through the coaching ranks, **Aliou Cisse** replaced Alain Giresse after their failure in the group phase of the last Nations Cup.

Probable line-up Abdoulaye Diallo; Lamine Gassama, Kalidou Koulibaly, Kara Mbodji, Saliou Ciss; Cheikhou Kouyate, Idrissa Gueye, Mohamed Diame; Keita Balde, Sadio Mane, Mame Biriam Diouf

TUNISIA

Stopped... keeping out Libya

This will be a 13th successive appearance for the Tunisians at the Nations Cup finals, stretching back to when they first hosted the event in 1994.

But their consistency has only been rewarded with one title – as they hosted the tournament for a second time, in 2004.

At the last finals they reached the last eight but were eliminated in controversial circumstances by hosts Equatorial Guinea. That led to some wild conspiracy theories, which saw CAF threaten to ban Tunisia from future editions.

They had to grovel to take their place in the 2017 qualifiers, and clinched top place in their group on the last day of the preliminaries.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Aymen Abdennour is the backbone of the side, Wahbi Khazri played for France at under-21 level and Hamdi Harbaoui is back after three years out of the team.

▼ THE COACH

The 70-year-old former Poland international **Henryk Kasperczak** will compete at his seventh Nations Cup finals – an achievement bettered only by Claude Le Roy.

Probable line-up Aymen Mathlouthi; Hamdi Nagguez, Aymen Abdennour, Chamseddine Dhaoudi, Bilel Mohsni, Ali Maaloul; Mohamed Amine Ben Amor, Ferjani Sassi, Anis Ben Hatira, Wahbi Khazri; Hamdi Harbaoui

ZIMBABWE

Goals... Knowledge Musona

Qualifying for the Nations Cup came against the backdrop of a bankrupt football association, who had to turn to wealthy patrons and benefactors to help pay their way through the campaign.

Trips included nine-hour bus journeys as they could not afford plane tickets, but it galvanised a winning spirit among a talented squad, who defied the economic odds to finish top of their group, where Guinea had been favoured.

Zimbabwe have now qualified for a third finals appearance but this one comes more than a decade since the last. As they do not allow dual citizenship, bids to attract overseas players in with links to the country have largely fallen short.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Khama Billiat is the favourite to be named CAF's best African-based player, Costa Nhamoinesu is a set-piece danger and Knowledge Musona can also score goals.

▼ THE COACH

Callisto Pasuwa made his name by taking the popular Dynamos club to four successive Zimbabwe league titles. The 46-year-old is a former international defender.

Probable line-up Tatenda Mukuruva; Hardlife Zvirekwi, Eric Chipeta, Costa Nhamoinesu, Onismor Bhasera; Willard Katsande, Blessing Moyo, Marvelous Nakamba, Kudawashe Mahachi; Khama Billiat, Knowledge Musona

GROUP C

IVORY COAST

Up front... Jonathan Kodjia (right)

The reigning champions have undergone a significant change to their side since winning in Equatorial Guinea – not least the decision of Yaya Toure to retire from the international game, with his last match being the 2015 Final.

Gervinho has suffered a serious knee injury and misses out this time, while Eric Bailly's participation is in doubt.

However, after something of a slow start to his tenure, coach Michel Dussuyer has a team that will give the defence of their title a decent tilt. He could also have winger Wilfred Zaha at his disposal after the England international declared his intention to now play for the Elephants.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

There are fitness doubts over Eric Bailly, while **Serge Aurier** is a hugely controversial character. Wilfred Bony was vital in the 2015 success.

▼ THE COACH

Frenchman **Michel Dussuyer** led Guinea to the quarter-finals in 2004 and another last-eight appearance in 2015. Played for Cannes and Nice, and has also coached Benin

Probable line-up Badra Ali Sangare; Serge Aurier, Eric Bailly, Lamine Kone, Adama Traore; Max Gradel, Geoffroy Serey Die, Franck Kessie, Salomon Kalou; Jonathan Kodjia, Wilfred Bony

DR CONGO

Missing... Yannick Bolaise (left)

Over the years, the Congolese have consistently qualified for the Nations Cup yet rarely threatened. But that is starting to change as the Leopards finished third at the last finals and displayed plenty of acumen in the qualifying tournament.

This is despite the current socio-political situation in the country, which saw the government suspend all league football indefinetely in December.

The side's resolve will be tested immediately in Gabon, as they play Morocco and Ivory Coast in their first two games, and an injury to winger Yannick Bolasie – who has suffered ligament damage – is a blow to their aspirations.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Neeskens Kebano is the team's playmaker, Cedric Bakambu has been making his mark at Villarreal in Spain and **Dieumerci Mbokani** has now returned to the side.

▼ THE COACH

Florent Ibenge took AS Vita Club to the Final of the 2014 Champions League and DR Congo to third at the 2015 Nations Cup three months later. Still does both jobs.

Probable line-up Ley Matampi; Issama Mpeko, Marcel Tisserand, Gabriel Zakuani, Fabrice Nsakala; Cedric Bakambu, Chancel Mbemba, Youssouf Mulumbu, Neeskens Kebano; Jonathan Bolingi, Dieumerci Mbokani

MOROCCO

Familiar... Sofiane Boufal (in red)

After they decided against hosting the 2015 tournament on grounds that were rather spurious, Morocco were supposed to be banned from the Nations Cup for the next two tournaments.

However, after appealing to CAS, the Confederation of African Football's decision was later overturned and the Atlas Lions take their place in Gabon.

After just two games into the qualifying campaign they opted to surprisingly move aside Badou Zaki and brought in Herve Renard.

Although qualification was eventually achieved with a measure of comfort, Morocco have been far from convincing and will have to win over the doubters.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Younes Belhanda has been a major catalyst at Nice, Mehdi Benatia has struggled at Bayern Munich and Sofiane Boufal used to play for Renard at Lille.

▼ THE COACH

Herve Renard used to run a successful garbage collection company before winning the Nations Cup with Zambia in 2012 and in 2015 with Ivory Coast.

Probable line-up Munir Mohamedi; Fouad Chafik, Mehdi Benatia, Manuel Da Costa, Achraf Lazaar; Nordin Amrabat, Romain Saiss, Younes Belhanda, Moubarak Boussoufa; Sofiane Boufal, Oussama Tannane

TOGO

Backing... Togo supporters

Togo were out of the running in the qualifiers when Claude Le Roy replaced Tom Saintfiet, but he engineered a turn around that saw *Les Eperviers* finish second in their group and grab one of the two spots reserved for the best-placed runners-up.

Emmanuel Adebayor is back playing for the national side but he will be extremely short of match fitness as he has been clubless since the summer.

Togo have qualified for eight previous tournaments – they did not participate in Angola 2010 after their bus was attacked in Cabinda and two delegation members killed – but only got past the group phase once.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Emmanuel Adebayor is without a club side, **Jonathan Ayite** joins his brother Floyd in the squad and the tenacity of Alaixys Romao is likely to attract the attention of referees.

▼ THE COACH

Frenchman **Claude Le Roy** will extend his record to eight finals, including winning with Cameroon in 1988, and has only once failed to reach the quarter-finals.

Probable line-up Kossi Agassa; Serge Akakpo, Sadat Ouro-Akoriko, Vincent Bossou, Abdoul-Gafar Mamah; Mathieu Dossevi, Alaixys Romao, Serge Gakpe, Floyd Ayite; Peniel Mlapa, Emmanuel Adebayor

GROUP D

EGYPT

Celebration... after scoring in a friendly against Guinea

After missing the last three finals, Egypt return to the tournament line-up, limping along after years of tumult in the north African country.

The Port Said stadium riot in 2012, which killed 73 people, led to a suspension of the league and then, when it resumed, games were played behind closed doors.

Egypt's economy has been hit badly and football clubs are struggling to survive. Against this backdrop, the national team getting the better of Nigeria in qualifying was a big boost.

Egypt were the first winners in 1957, and have won more titles (seven) and played more games (90) than anyone else.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

At 24, **Mohamed Salah** is ninth on the country's all-time scoring list. Twenty year his senior, keeper Essam El Hadary will become the oldest competitor ever at the finals.

▼ THE COACH

Argtentinian **Hector Cuper** has a fine CV, consisting of two Champions League finals with Valencia, a season at Internazionale and a job with Egypt since March 2015.

Probable line-up Essam El Hadary; Omar Gaber, Ali Gabr, Ahmed Hegazy, Mohamed Abdel-Shafy; Abdallah Said, Mohamed Elneny, Tarek Hamed, Ahmed Elmohamady; Mohamed Salah, Mahmoud Hassan Trezeguet

GHANA

Solid...Jonathan Mensah (right)

A 2-0 loss in November to Egypt in World Cup qualification has left Ghana under enormous pressure to deliver at the Nations Cup – a tournament they have not won since 1982.

They meet Egypt again in the group stage and also have to contend with Mali, who have beaten them to bronze medals in recent editions.

Ghana have not won in their last five internationals after coming through a modest Nations Cup qualifying group, even though there is a familiar look about their squad.

Experienced players from past African Nations tournaments, such as Asamoah Gyan and Edward Agyemang-Badu, are still key to the side.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Dede Ayew is back from injury, while fellow striker Frank Acheampong isn't prolific. **Baba Rahman** gets more opportunity to attack from left-back with Ghana.

▼ THE COACH

Avram Grant was appointed coach one month before the last tournament and took Ghana all the way to the Final. He will celebrate his 62nd birthday at these finals.

Probable line-up Razak Brimah; Harrison Afful, John Boye, Jonathan Mensah, Baba Rahman; Mubarak Wakaso, Thomas Partey, Christian Atsu; Frank Acheampong, Dede Ayew, Asamoah Gyan

MALI

Strong...Hamari Traore (left)

Mali were third at the 2012 and 2013 editions but two years ago suffered elimination in unusual circumstances, knocked out after the first round in a drawing of lots after they finished level with Guinea on an identical record.

That was only the third time in nine Nations Cup appearances they have not got past the first round.

Mali qualified by winning five of their six group games, drawing the other, while undergoing much change to playing personnel as Alain Giresse returned to take charge for a second time.

They are a team who always play above expectation at the finals and prove competitive.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

Adama Traore was the best player at the 2015 Under-20 World Cup, while Modibo Maiga will be at a fifth Nations Cup. Molla Wague is a former French youth international.

▼ THE COACH

The last time **Alain Giresse** took Mali to the Nations Cup finals they finished third in 2012. This will be the fourth finals for the 64-year-old former French international.

Probable line-up Soumbeyla Diakite; Hamari Traore, Salif Coulibaly, Molla Wague, Youssouf Kone; Adama Traore, Yacouba Sylla, Moussa Doumbia, Sambou Yatabare; Moussa Marega, Modibo Maiga

UGANDA

Prepared... Denis Iguma (right)

After years of finals heartbreak, Uganda are at last back in the Nations Cup showpiece.

Their last appearance was in 1978, when they finished runners-up, but they have come agonisingly close in recent years with Scotsman Bobby Williamson lifting the level of their national side and then Serbian journeyman Milutin Sredojevich taking them over the line.

The 1-0 home victory in their final qualifier in September over the Comoros Islands set off furious celebrations.

Uganda go into the tournament well prepared with training camps throughout December and then in Dubai on the eve of the finals.

▼ KEY PLAYERS

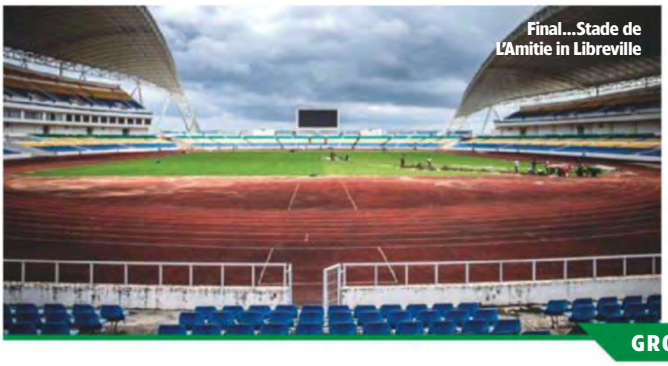
Denis Onyango was his country's best player of 2016. Farouk Miya scored the goal that secured qualification, while **Tony Mawejje** plays his club football in Iceland.

▼ THE COACH

Milutin Sredojevich has worked at club and country level throughout Africa for more than a decade. The 47-year-old is Serbian-born but grew up in Ljubljana.

Probable line-up Dennis Onyango; Nicolas Wadwaba, Murushid Juuko, Isaac Isinde, Jospeh Ochaya; Khalid Aucho, Tony Mawejje, Denis Iguma, Moses Oloya; Farouk Miya, Geoffrey Massa

Fixtures


Final...Stade de L'Amitie in Libreville

Semi venue...Stade de Franceville

GROUPS

GROUP A

Jan 14 *(Libreville):* Gabon v Guinea-Bissau

Jan 14 *(Libreville):* Burkina Faso v Cameroon

Jan 18 *(Libreville):* Gabon v Burkina Faso

Jan 18 *(Libreville):* Cameroon v Guinea-Bissau

Jan 22 *(Franceville):* Burkina Faso v Guinea-Bissau

Jan 22 *(Libreville):* Gabon v Cameroon

GROUP B

Jan 15 *(Franceville):* Algeria v Zimbabwe

Jan 15 *(Franceville):* Senegal v Tunisia

Jan 19 *(Franceville):* Algeria v Tunisia

Jan 19 *(Franceville):* Senegal v Zimbabwe

Jan 23 *(Franceville):* Algeria v Senegal

Jan 23 *(Libreville):* Tunisia v Zimbabwe

GROUP C

Jan 16 *(Oyem):* Ivory Coast v Togo

Jan 16 *(Oyem):* DR Congo v Morocco

Jan 20 *(Oyem):* DR Congo v Ivory Coast

Jan 20 *(Oyem):* Morocco v Togo

Jan 24 *(Port Gentil):* DR Congo v Togo

Jan 24 *(Oyem):* Ivory Coast v Morocco

GROUP D

Jan 17 *(Port Gentil):* Ghana v Uganda

Jan 17 *(Port Gentil):* Egypt v Mali

Jan 21 *(Port Gentil):* Ghana v Mali

Jan 21 *(Port Gentil):* Egypt v Uganda

Jan 25 *(Port Gentil):* Egypt v Ghana

Jan 25 *(Oyem):* Mali v Uganda

The prize... ANC trophy

QUARTERS

Jan 28 *(Libreville):* Winner Group A v Runner-up Group B

Jan 28 *(Franceville):* Winner Group B v Runner-up Group A

Jan 29 *(Oyem):* Winner Group C v Runner-up Group D

Jan 29 *(Port Gentil):* Winner Group D v Runner-up Group C

SEMIS

Feb 1 *(Libreville):* Winner Libreville v Winner Port Gentil

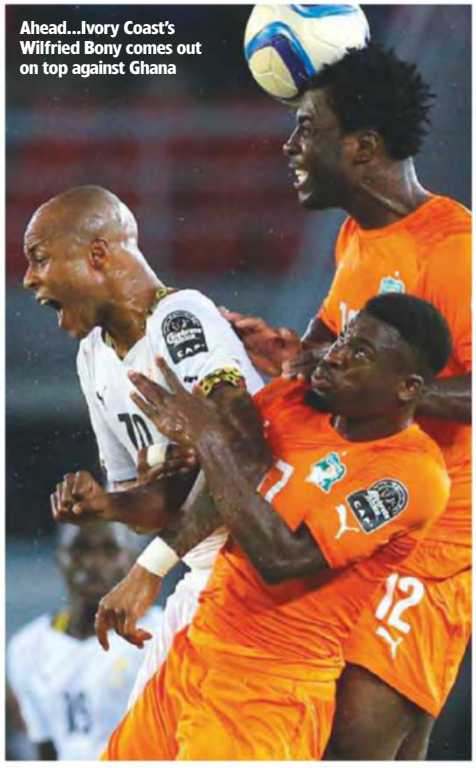
Feb 2 *(Franceville):* Winner Franceville v Winner Oyem

3RD PLACE

Feb 4 *(Port Gentil)*

FINAL

Feb 5 *(Libreville)*


Ahead...Ivory Coast's Wilfried Bony comes out on top against Ghana

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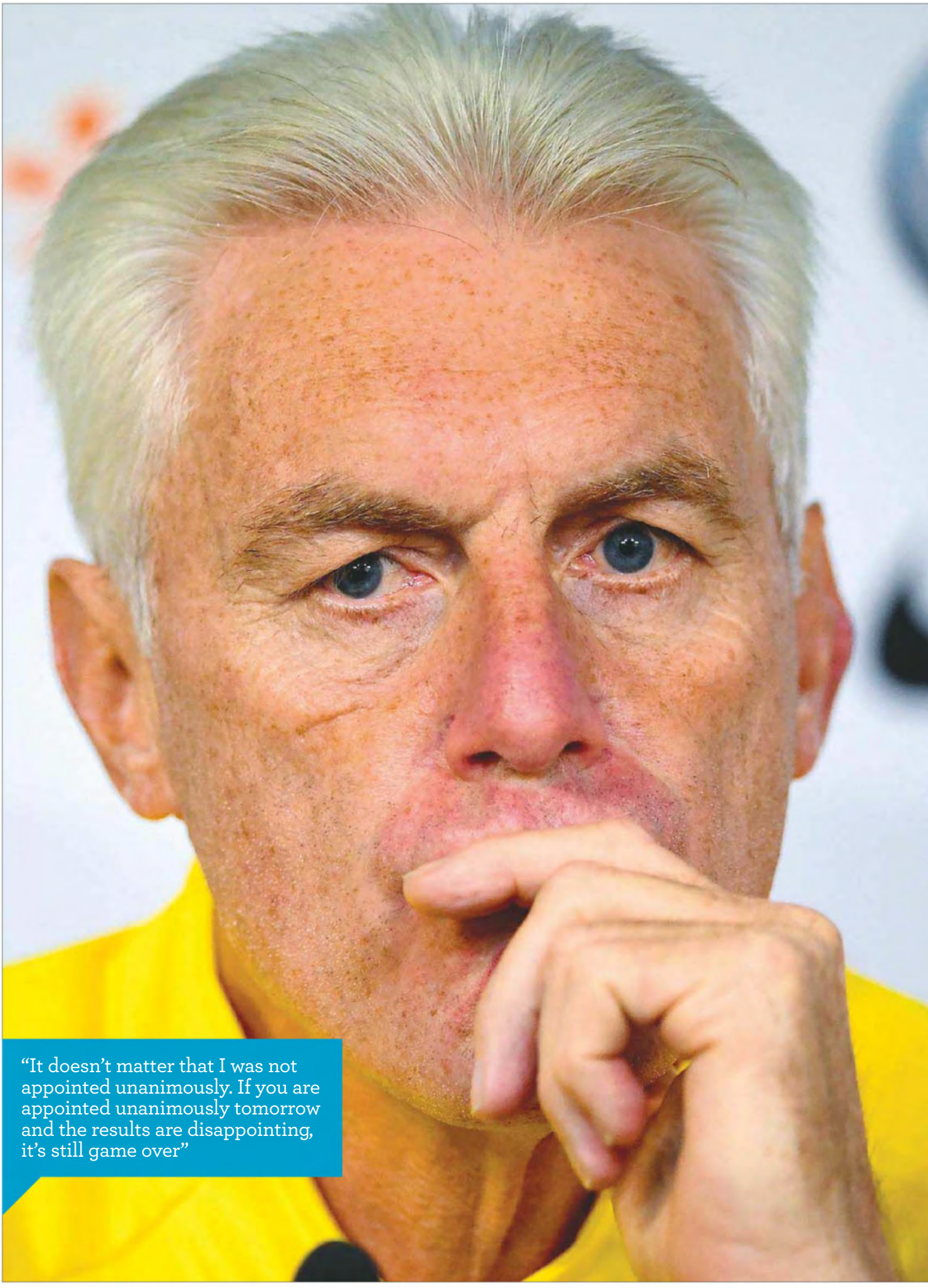


"It doesn't matter that I was not appointed unanimously. If you are appointed unanimously tomorrow and the results are disappointing, it's still game over"

Facetoface

HUGO BROOS

"Everyone had told me that there is one thing that is important in Cameroon – and that's football"

The Belgian coach may not have been first choice to lead Cameroon, but he's wasted no time in making his mark on the team

You were appointed coach of Cameroon in March. How has the journey been so far?
There was a lot of work to do because we had to renew the team. We needed young players. The last months I watched players all around Europe. I think we changed a lot. The mentality has changed and we have enjoyed good results. We qualified for the African Cup of Nations, and the qualifiers for the World Cup in Russia began two months ago. We drew twice: a very good draw in Algeria and a poor draw against Zambia. But, OK, that can happen. I am happy with what has happened in the last eight months.

Initially you were not on the shortlist of the Cameroon football federation, FECAFOOT. Did that bother you?
No, but a lot of people did seem bothered. Why should it bother me? Choices were made and I'm now the coach of Cameroon. I applied last December and I heard nothing back until I suddenly got a phone call and they said: "You're the leading candidate and nine chances out of 10 you will be appointed." Three days later I got a message: "You will be the new national coach of Cameroon." It doesn't matter that I was not appointed unanimously. If you are appointed unanimously tomorrow and the results are disappointing, it's game over still. It doesn't make a difference. My first press conference was unbelievable. I had never experienced that in my career. Everyone was negative! There was no confidence, there was nothing. I had to start from zero. Now it is much better, but the fact I was not on the shortlist was a problem for many people.

Why was there so much negativity around the Cameroon national team when you arrived?
First of all, there are three people who choose the coach: the president, the president of the football federation and the minister of sport. They decide. It is a very important choice and everyone is involved – the press, the people in the street. Everyone likes to talk about the trainer. [For] two or three months the whole country is talking about who will be the coach. There were some French candidates because of the history between France and Cameroon. There was a Cameroonian coach and a Serb coach. Everyone had his favourite. I wasn't mentioned, so I couldn't be someone's favourite. I think that was the real problem. The moment I was chosen, all those other people who had their favourites became negative. They said: "This is not a good coach; he hasn't even coached a national team."

Were you surprised that football is a matter of national and political importance?
Yes. I had known because I had asked around about Cameroon. Everyone had told me that there is one thing that is important in Cameroon – and that's football. *Les Lions Indomptables* are really very important; more than I could ever imagine.

What were your first days in Cameroon like?
After the press conference I went with my assistant, who is also from Belgium, to the hotel. We said: "Wow! What are we going to do now?" I said immediately to my assistant: "Look, we will do what we think we have to do. If it turns for the worse, then maybe in three, four months we will already be home again, but if we can change the situation, then we can stay for the long run." So we worked and we worked and we worked, from the first day. Maybe it's a little detail, but the day after the press conference there was a journalist who came to the hotel and he saw me working on my laptop and he asked: "What are you doing?" And I replied:"I am working for the team." So he took some pictures and the next day it was in the paper with the headline: Broos is already working. I had to change the perception about me, and I have succeeded I think.

What is the biggest change you think you have brought to the national team set-up?
There is a big change in mentality. To say it is a bit undignified, but I have cleaned up the group. The way the players interact now is different, during dinner, etc. It wasn't bad in the past, but there were different cliques. There was no collective spirit. The younger players feel that I give them chances. That wasn't the case either in the past. [Carlos] Kameni and other senior players were called "le cadre". What is "cadre?" You have to win. It is often not accepted that you kick Kameni and co out, but it was necessary. It was necessary. I want a different kind of football. So far I haven't

succeeded therein, but I do envisage a different kind of football.

How have you changed things?
Football has changed. You no longer require the big, forceful players who blow away everyone. The group's mentality has changed. The group has also become younger. The match against Zambia was a disaster, but the team wants to attack. In the past that wasn't so much the case. In the past the players came, because they had to. They were afraid to refuse because the whole of Cameroon would be on their back. They were not there with their whole heart. That's something that has changed. The players are really happy to be with the national team. I got some discipline in the team. I took some decisions in the beginning. A player who came one day too late and I said: "Ok, go home. You had to be here yesterday and you arrive today." Everyone was surprised; what is that coach doing? Players were starting to think about it; there will be discipline and organization. If there is no organization, there will be chaos.

> "You can compare Cameroon with Belgium in the sense that both countries had a very successful era, but that they were not ready to provide and produce the next generation. In Belgium, it took a decade"

You qualified for the African Cup of Nations finals fairly easily...
It was the friendly match against France that was key. I thought, well it is a friendly and it is not that important, but Cameroonians and the minister of sport really wanted to win. Everywhere I went I heard "we have to beat France". It was important. We didn't beat them, but everyone was delighted with the performance. That game was a boost of confidence. Afterwards the qualifiers for the African Cup of Nations became easier.

Your opening match in Gabon is against Burkina Faso...
Yes, but that is one of the great difficulties at the African Cup of Nations, and in Africa at large, about 80 per cent of the teams can go toe to toe. It's difficult. Most teams can match each other. The remaining 20 per cent are pushovers. But go and play Burkina Faso, go play Guinea-Bissau. I have watched their matches. It's not a matter of them rolling over. There are just a few teams in Africa of which you can outright say that you will win.

You play the hosts, Gabon, and will meet Pierre-Emerick Aubemayang, one of the best strikers in the world. Does that game have extra spice?
On paper yes, but it doesn't imply that we will blow away Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau. Gabon are the hosts, that is always more complicated. In theory, it could be a match with both teams qualified. It may also decide who finishes top of the group, even though I find that less important.

Fierce...Cameroon's Allan Nyom in action against France

Why are former captain Stephane M'bia and goalkeeper Carlos Kameni not in your plans?
When I became coach of Cameroon it was pointed out to me that the team was a little bit too old. When I made my first selection, 30 per cent of the 25 players were 30 years old or more. So if you have to play the CAN, ok, you can do it with those players, but when you have to go to Russia – they are too old; your team becomes too old. You have to select some young players. It is a pity for Stephane because he was someone who was important for Cameroon, but I made that choice and for the moment I think I made a good choice.

Can you bring back Liverpool's Joel Matip?
I don't know if he really doesn't want to return for Cameroon. I don't know. I have tried to contact him, but I am not succeeding. He has to tell me: yes or no. That is a bit frustrating. If he doesn't want to return we no longer have to consider him. But in Cameroon it is as if I don't want to select Matip. If there is one person who wants Matip to return to the squad, it's me. I am still trying. If he wants to return, he will be a certainty in Gabon.

What would constitute a successful Nations Cup for Cameroon?
I think if we can reach the quarter-finals, or maybe semi-finals, we have to be very, very happy.

Could you possibly win it?
Everyone can win it. Before Euro 2016 in France

In charge...the coach with a member of his backroom staff

Focused...he wants to win something with Cameroon

I would have said that Wales wouldn't defeat Belgium, but they did. You have to always be at your best level, never have a bad day – because when you have a bad day it can be catastrophic.

Winning in Gabon would be a great way of preparing for the 2019 African Nations Cup, which Cameroon will host...
Cameroon wants to have a great team for that tournament, but I have to win this CAN and qualify us for Russia. I would be happy if tomorrow the federation president tells me: "Coach, ok, try to build a new team for 2019." But he doesn't. I have no problem with [it], but there is no doubt that the 2019 Cup of Nations is maybe twice as important as the one now in January in Gabon for Cameroon.

Who are the favourites to win this African Cup of Nations?
For me, there are two teams who will be favourites. Algeria is a very good team, with players playing

Wanted...Joel Matip

all over Europe in good teams. They are used to playing at a high level. This is a bit of a problem in Cameroon. We have players who are not playing – they are on the bench or not even on the team sheet at their clubs. Ivory Coast has a team that has been together for a number of years. They have brought in some young players.

In the last decade, Cameroon have had 10 different coaches. Is that one of the reasons why there is no singular vision?
No, I have already often said here that you can compare Cameroon with Belgium in the sense that both countries had a very successful era, but that they were not ready to provide and produce the next generation. In Belgium, it took a decade. Cameroon also had a brilliant generation, but afterwards Cameroon plunged into a deep hole. There was no FA administration and policy for the past four years. There was no FA in Cameroon! A committee governed football for four years. It was just pure guesswork. Now we can fall back on a good organization to achieve good performances.

Don't you miss having a player of the calibre of Samuel Eto'o?
Cameroon always had one big player in the past: Roger Milla, Eto'o, Geremi. At the moment we don't have that kind of player in our team, so we need a team performance. We can't wait at any given moment for a flash of a player because we don't have those players.

In the long term, what style of play do you want to implement in the team?
A style that wins games. We have to make Cameroon a team again that plays modern football. The players know that. They all play in Europe. They know how to play. We want to create a coherent collective with offensive urges so that we can win the matches with good football.

Prior to joining Cameroon, you struggled to find a job in Belgium. How come?
I have been asked that question umpteen times and I don't have an answer. It may just be a matter of...I am 64. It is not normal that I couldn't get a job in Belgium considering my career, my CV and what I won as a coach. I was a bit frustrated about that in the beginning, but you can't change that. They want you or they don't. If they don't want me in Belgium, I look for work abroad.

Is coaching Cameroon the crowning achievement of your career?
No, because I am ambitious and it is nice to do it, but I'd like to win something with Cameroon. Perhaps then I will perhaps say this was the highlight of my career. Let's talk in a few years and see.

Interview by Samindra Kunti

6 of the best

Super subs

Nick Bidwell profiles half a dozen players who do their best work when appearing from the bench

1 Angel CORREA

ATLETICO MADRID

No one should be surprised this Argentinian striker has become one of the preferred last-half-hour men of Atletico coach Diego Simeone as the 21-year-old's characteristics make him perfect for the role, with his sparky vitality, skill, low centre of gravity and marksmanship.

His shtick is to make things happen, and rarely does he fail to do so, needing just a minute on the pitch to score the opening goal in a win at Eibar last season, and coolly slotting home the equaliser this term in a 1-1 draw at Barcelona.

Nurtured at San Lorenzo before moving to Atletico in the summer of 2014, his attitude is to seize the moment; a state of mind which probably stems from an against-the-odds back story.

His early life was spent on the wrong side of the tracks in his home city of Rosario, he then had to overcome the premature deaths of his father and brother, before a heart condition interrupted his first year in Spain.

2 Kamil GROSICKI

RENNES

Throughout his two-and-a-half years at the French club, the Polish winger has proved something of an enigma, often being ineffectual as a starter, but nearly always decisive when used in short, sharp bursts.

Seen as the man to turn the tide with an incisive jinking run, he can provide for others as well as get his own name on the score-sheet. Last season, he scored a half-a-dozen goals when coming on as a sub and the 28-year-old has continued to turn on the cameo style in the current campaign, engineering come-from-behind victories over Marseille and Nantes.

Approaching 50 caps for his country, he used to be infamous for drinking, gambling and a lack of dedication, but marriage and fatherhood have calmed him down.

3 Kelechi IHEANACHO

MANCHESTER CITY

At the heart of Pep Guardiola's coaching philosophy is his constant reshuffling of his options on the pitch. And when it comes to posing new problems for the opposition, this emerging Nigerian front runner is just the player for the joker brief.

Combining the pace and cute movement necessary to take advantage of tiring defenders, he has the fearlessness of youth and the finishing of a born predator.

The 20-year-old has made it look easy since his City debut in August 2015, scoring winners against Crystal Palace and Swansea City last season and Southampton and Borussia Monchengladbach this term.

He has also proved understudy gold for Nigeria, scoring the only goal of the game in a friendly with Mali in May.

4 Stipe PERICA

UDINESE

A Croat striker of much promise, he has made a name for himself in Italy this season as a final-act ice- breaker, particularly catching the eye when volleying home a last-ditch winner at Milan in September.

The 21-year-old, who began his career with Croatian coastal outfit Zardar, was once one of Chelsea's battalion of talented young global loanees, first spending time with Dutch side NAC Breda and then Udinese, who took him on permanently this summer.

Powerful, strong in the air and improving all the time technically, he is a combative character and not at all afraid too speak his mind, describing Serie A as "hell" earlier this season, saying: "In no other country is it more difficult to establish oneself than Italy."

5 Nils PETERSEN

FREIBURG

A member of the German team that won silver at the Rio Olympics, the 28-year-old former Carl Zeiss Jena, Cottbus, Bayern Munich and Werder Bremen striker could soon be the recipient of another honour – that of the most goal-hungry sub in the history of the Bundesliga.

The tap-in he registered in a 4-2 loss to Mainz in November was his fourth from the bench this season and he now boasts a career total of 14, just four adrift of the record-holder, former Bayern attacker Alexander Zickler.

While Freiburg fans frequently demand his entry into the arena, the hit man remains unconvinced by the allure of part-time stardom. "It doesn't seem right that I should get the credit," he says. "The other attackers run the defence ragged and then I arrive. People think I only have to come on to decide a game.

"It's not that simple."

6 Souleymane CAMARA

MONTPELLIER

The Canal Plus commentator who last season dubbed the 34-year-old Senegalese "the best replacement of the 21st century" may not have been exaggerating too much.

Since the French top flight was rebranded as Ligue 1 in 2002, no sub has scored more goals after coming on than "Soule", and in 10 seasons at Montpellier the striker has served the club admirably, supplying five strikes from the bench in their championship winning campaign of 2011-12.

Part of the Senegal side that made the 2002 World Cup quarter-finals, he knows how to make an impact. Quick to adjust to the pace of a game, he's even quicker when it comes to seizing on a chance.

Previously at Monaco, Guingamp (on loan) and Nice, he has spent 17 seasons on the French pro circuit, although he did nearly join Blackburn Rovers five years ago.

Glenn Moore

Nigeria clean up again

Super Falcons secure eighth Nations Cup

There were five hours until kick-off yet the stadium was already packed. The only available spaces were saved for the president and his entourage. Outside, thousands of frustrated spectators searched for a means of entry before heading for one of the three fan parks set up to meet the huge demand. Inside, two of the powerhouses of African football prepared for another Final.

This, though, was a West African showdown with a difference. The players were female. The climax of the 2016 Africa Women Nations Cup, the 12th edition of the competition, was the most eagerly awaited event of the year in Cameroon. The progress of *Les Lionesses* had stopped the nation.

All that remained was for the team to defeat Nigeria's Super Falcons and reverse the result of the Finals of 2004 and 2014.

But it was not to be. A late goal from Desire Oparanozie earned Nigeria an eighth title in 10 stagings. Cameroon ran them close, as had Ghana and South Africa earlier in the tournament, as the African women's game took a big step forward.

Two years ago, in Namibia, attendances were moderate. This time there were 40,000 full houses for all Cameroon games and respectable crowds for other matches. As one player, Egypt's Esraa Osama, told BBC World: "I never imagined people would be that interested in women's football.

"I have been playing professionally for 14 years and it's the first time I felt what a male footballer must feel."

Cameroon used the tournament in part as preparation for the 2019 men's Nations Cup, with a new stadium constructed in the coastal city of Limbe and the capacity increased at Stade Ahmadou Ahidjo in the capital, Yaounde. In addition, the finals were used in part to promote tourism and a sense of stability in a country whose military is fighting jihadist insurgents Boko Haram in the north. A campaign to discourage the custom of marrying young girls off at the expense of their education was also tied in with the competition.

But it was also regarded as a major event in its own right. President Paul Biya attended the opening match with his wife, as did former Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o. They saw Cameroon beat Egypt 2-0 at the start of what was to be a clean sweep in Group A, with subsequent wins over South Africa, who also qualified for the last four, and Zimbabwe. In group B, Nigeria and Ghana progressed with ease, drawing 1-1 with each other and beating Mali and debutants Kenya.

The knockout matches were all decided by a solitary goal. In the semi-finals, Raissa Feudjio's strike took Cameroon past Ghana and Nigeria's Oparanozie put South Africa out. Ghana, who will host in 2018, took third place with another 1-0 win, over *Bayana Bayana*.

In the Final, Cameroon had the better of the first half, but Gabrielle Aboudi Onguene, who plays for Russian club Rossiyanka, and Michele Ngono Mani, who is with Minsk of Belarus, both missed chances. The home side continued to press after the break but, with five minutes left, Arsenal's Asisat Oshoala fed Oparanozie. Her goal was the only one Cameroon conceded all tournament.

It completed quite a hat-trick as the Guingamp striker also scored when Nigeria won the 2010 and 2014 Finals.

Nigeria, whose squad also included Francisca Ordega of NWSL finalists Washington Spirit, Paris Saint-Germain's Ngozi Ebere and other players based in countries from Sweden to South Korea, are unquestionably Africa's best. They have qualified for all seven Women's World Cups, making more appearances than the rest of Africa combined.

However, as coach Florence Omagbemi, a four-time Nations Cup winner as a player and a member of FIFA's technical study group, admitted before the tournament, the African game remains below par. Only Nigeria, and then only in 1999, have reached a World Cup quarter-final.

As more players like Cameroon's Gaelle Enganamouit (Rosengard) and Augustine Ejangue (Fortuna Hjorring) gain UEFA Champions League experience, standards will rise – but problems abound.

Omagbemi went unpaid for months prior to the tournament and when the players returned to Nigeria they refused to leave their hotel in Abuja until back pay and bonuses – alleged to total more than $25,000 each – were forthcoming.

Oshoala told BBC Sport: "This is a fight about the welfare of the team. We went

> "I have been playing professionally for 14 years and it's the first time I felt what a male footballer must feel"
>
> **Egypt midfielder Esraa Osama**

Potential...Cameroon's Gaelle Enganamouit

Africa's best ...Nigeria

out to fight for the nation even without being paid. We won the trophy but are not made to feel like champions. We are being treated like we are age-group players, like the Under-17s and the Under-20s."

There are cultural issues, too. The women's game has long been more tolerant of gay players than the men's. This may be explained by a greater proportion of gay players, but also reflects a more liberal attitude among players and supporters. Yet this does not apply everywhere. In parts of the world, prejudice remains fierce, to the extent of criminalisation. This includes more than 30 African countries, which in some cases impacts upon women's football.

A week after steering Ghana to third place, coach Yussif Basigi told a local radio station: "Lesbianism happens across the globe in women's football teams. It is a big problem and it is very worrying.

"I have always warned my players against engaging themselves in lesbianism. Apart from the fact that it is an evil act, it also affects them in the game."

Basigi's view echoed past comments in Nigeria from officials, and former coach Eucharia Uche said in 2011: "The lesbians in our team were really a big problem but since I'm coach, that has been cleared up." She added: "There are no more lesbian players. I cannot tolerate this dirty life."

As current Nigeria coach Omagbemi says: "Women's football in Africa has made great progress. There are a lot of talents, but still much to be done." WS

Round-up

Final...Lyon (in red) and Wolfsburg

▼FINAL REPEAT IN LAST EIGHT

The quarter-final draw for the UEFA Women's Champions League threw up a repeat of the 2016 Final with holders Lyon facing Wolfsburg, who they beat on penalties in May. The winners will meet Manchester City or Fortuna Hjorring in the semi-finals.

The other half of the draw has a glamorous look with Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain involved, though of the quartet Swedish club Rosengard are the most established in the women's game.

• **Quarter-finals:** Fortuna Hjorring v Manchester City; Rosengard v Barcelona, Wolfsburg v Lyon; Bayern Munich v Paris Saint-Germain. (*to be played March 22/23 & 29/30*)

▼CHAN HONOURED

Chan Yuen-ting won the AFC's women's coach of the year award after becoming the first woman to lead a men's team to a national title. The 27-year-old, nicknamed "Beef Ball" due, she says, to being "as stubborn as a cow" as a child, coached Eastern to the Hong Kong Premier League title.

Stubborn...Chan Yuen-ting

New boss ...Peter Gerhardsson

▼SUNDHAGE SUCCESSOR NAMED

Peter Gerhardsson will take over from Pia Sundhage as coach of Sweden when the much-decorated incumbent steps down after Euro 2017. Gerhardsson has been coach of Swedish men's top-flight club BK Hacken since 2009.

▼BACHMANN TRANSFER LIFTS WSL

Keen to strengthen after relinquishing their WSL title, Chelsea Ladies followed up the acquisition of Norway captain Maren Mjelde with the signing of Swiss striker Ramona Bachmann from Wolfsburg. She is the highest-profile foreigner to join Chelsea since they fielded Japanese World Cup winner Yuki Ogimi from 2013-2014.

▼MEXICO TO KICK OFF

Mexico is to have its first pro women's league. The Liga MX Femenil will commence in September 2017, preceded by a cup competition in April. Every club in the men's 18-team Liga MX will be expected to enter. To promote Mexican youth, no foreign players will be permitted initially, with only two players aged over 23 per team.

▼BELEZA WIN IN JAPAN

Beleza, from western Tokyo, won the Japanese league conceding only eight goals in the 18-match programme to finish seven points clear of Kobe Leonesa. Belaza is linked to men's J2 league team Tokyo Verdy.

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout [STRIKERS]

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Kasper DOLBERG

Age 19 (06.10.97), Ajax (Hol) & Denmark

In a sentence
The latest in a long line of classy Scandinavians at Ajax, the teenager is enjoying a remarkable first season in Amsterdam, proving himself to be both an effective goalscorer and an elegant force of nature.

What they say.
Gery Vink, Ajax youth-team coach: "He has huge potential. I've often said to myself that he's the new Ibrahimovic." Former Feyenoord and Holland playmaker Wim Van Hanegem: "Dolberg is a really good striker and I've been saying it for a while. He has a good feel for the game and because of that, makes his teammates play even better." Celta Vigo and Denmark midfielder Daniel Wass: "He has incredible qualities. He poses enormous problems to a defence and looks like a star in the making."

> "He poses enormous problems to a defence and looks like a star in the making"
> Denmark midfielder Daniel Wass

The story so far
Born and bred in the East Jutland city of Silkeborg, he joined his local side at the age of 12 and was snapped up by Ajax for €300,000 in 2015, in a deal set up by John Steen Olsen, the scout who brought Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Jesper Gronkjaer and Christian Eriksen to the Dutch club. He spent his first season shining for the Amsterdam side's under-19s and then broke into the first team last summer, marking his competitive debut with a fine long-range strike in a Champions League qualifier against Greek side PAOK. His reputation was further enhanced with a fine run and finish in the *Klassieker* against Feyenoord and an 18-minute hat-trick in a 5-0 demolition of NEC. He came off the bench to win his first full cap for Denmark in a World Cup qualifier against Kazakhstan in November.

The next step
Although Ajax are without doubt very much a selling club these days, they will be doing all they can to keep their prodigy on board for at least the next 18 months. Under contract until June 2021, he's a level-headed lad and keen not to move on too early.

Effective...in action against Celta Vigo

Strengths
A natural finisher, he boasts the physicality and aerial ability of a born target man while also being quick, mobile and agile. Intelligent and technically proficient, he's especially good at showing for the ball, then turning and exploding into life.

Weaknesses
His left-foot is not as strong as his right. And, having known good times in his professional career so far, we'll have to wait and see how well he is able to react to adversity.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT DOLBERG

- During his formative years in Denmark he often played up on the left wing.
- He is the youngest non-Dutch player to score a hat-trick for Ajax.
- He was on an international roll this autumn, winning his first cap for Denmark's under-21s in September and then making his senior bow just two months later.

Lucas ALARIO

Age 24 (08.10.92), River Plate & Argentina
Scored for River in the semi-finals and Finals of the Libertadores Cup and the Club World Cup in 2015, and in the Sudamericana Cup in 2016. Cost €1m when signed from Colon Santa Fe in July 2015 but is now worth some 15 times more.

LUAN

Age 23 (27.03.93), Gremio & Brazil
Little wonder so many European clubs are chasing the Brazilian Olympian. Hard to stop when dribbling at pace, he creates and scores goals, and has an impressive work ethic. Previously rejected by a string of top Brazilian clubs for being too frail.

Jean-Kevin AUGUSTIN

Age 19 (16.06.97), Paris Saint-Germain & France
Of Haitian descent, he was the star turn as France claimed the 2016 European Under-19 title, topping the scoring list with six goals and earning the Player of the Tournament prize.

Nikos KARELIS

Age 24 (24.02.92), Genk (Blg) & Greece
Big and strong, the international has proved himself to be sharpness personified since arriving in Belgium in 2016 from Panathinaikos. Made his Greek Super League debut for Ergotelis aged just 16.

Fyodor CHALOV

Age 18 (10.04.98), CSKA Moscow & Russia
Outgoing CSKA coach Leonid Slutsky may be notoriously conservative in his approach to the game, but even he could not wait to blood the club's highly promising academy graduate earlier this season. Lively, mobile and enterprising, the teen was especially prominent in the Champions League against Bayer Leverkusen.

Andrea BELOTTI

Age 23 (20.12.93), Torino & Italy
Old school centre-forward who was constantly among the goals throughout 2016. The hard-running Italy international is combative and excellent in his play with his back to goal. Recently extended his contract with Torino until 2021 and is now the subject of a €100m release clause – although that is applicable only to overseas buyers.

Gerard MORENO

Age 24 (07.04.92), Espanyol & Spain
Released by Espanyol in 2007 while still just a teenager, the Catalan-born front runner has been enjoying himself much more since returning to the *Periquitos* in the summer of 2015, having arrived from Villarreal for a fee believed to be worth €1.5m. Managed to find the net against his former employers in January 2016, but his joy was short-lived as he received a red card later on in the game.

Timo WERNER

Age 20 (06.03.96), RB Leipzig & Germany
In his first season at Bundseliga upstarts RB following a €10m move from hometown club Stuttgart, the under-21 international's form has alternated between the sublime and the ridiculous. While lauded for his goals and line-leading ability, there was much criticism for his blatant dive to earn a penalty against Schalke before the winter break.

World Soccer vintage

45 years ago

January 1972

Rivelino: the Brazilian World Cup star of Mexico

Manchester City and England midfielder Colin Bell was on the front cover of the January 1972 edition of *World Soccer*, but it was a Brazilian midfielder, who had played against Bell in the 1970 World Cup, that featured inside.

Eric Batty penned a player portrait which noted: "When the Brazilian national squad toured Europe in the summer of 1968, they brought with them several young players who had come to the fore since the [World Cup] failure of 1966. Among them, and by repute a skilful and talented *gaucher*, Roberto Rivelino from Sao Paulo.

"Rivelino was quick; decisive in his passing, exciting in his dribbling ability and an intelligent, constructive footballer with elegance and an instinct for creating the goal chance."

The Corinthians midfielder had been selected for that tour by coach Aymore Moreira, but as Batty continued: "However much Rivelino might develop in the following 18 months, it was unlikely that he would appear as a first choice in the 1970 World Cup in Mexico, for who could imagine him gaining preference over Pele and Gerson?"

And when Joao Saldanha took over from Moreira, Rivelino's chances looked even more remote.

"Brazil qualified for the World Cup without Rivelino even getting one touch of the ball in match play," wrote Batty.

However, Saldanha was ousted before Mexico 1970 and replaced by 1958 World Cup winner Mario Zagallo – and Rivelino's fortunes soon began to improve.

Batty explained: "Zagallo cast Rivelino for the old withdrawn left-winger role that Zagallo himself had filled with distinction for Brazil, enabling Pele, Gerson and Rivelino to play together for the first time.

"If Rivelino owed a great deal to the new Brazilian team chief, he certainly repaid his debt with interest, and in the Mexico World Cup it was he who largely dominated the midfield."

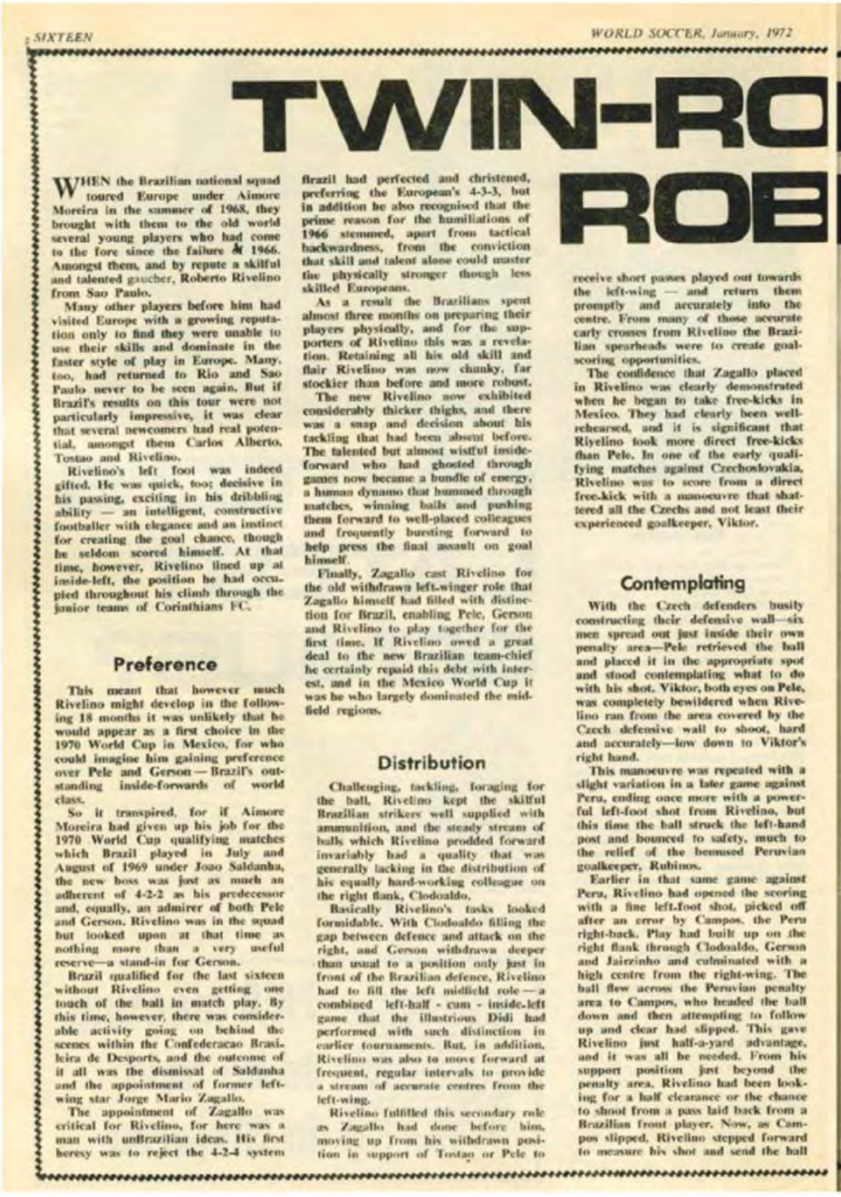
He scored three goals, including the winner in the semi-final against Uruguay, but as Batty continued: "Perhaps his most memorable contribution was reserved for the Final against Italy and the climactic last goal that gave Brazil a 4-1 win.

"Rivelino's first-time cross found Pele's feet and the Santos star turned, feinted to beat his oncoming opponent and then flicked the ball forward." The overlapping Carlos Alberto scored with a drilled shot into the far corner.

After the 1970 success, Rivelino returned to his club Corinthians where he was given a substantial pay rise. In Brazilian football, only Pele earned more.

"If the critics think he is being overpaid," Batty concluded, "let them reflect that Rivelino is one of the very few Brazilian players who will be an automatic choice when they come to defend their world title in 1974." WS

Portrait...Rivelino



SIXTEEN WORLD SOCCER, January, 1972

TWIN-RO ROB

WHEN the Brazilian national squad toured Europe under Aimore Moreira in the summer of 1968, they brought with them to the old world several young players who had come to the fore since the failure of 1966. Amongst them, and by repute a skilful and talented gaucher, Roberto Rivelino from Sao Paulo.

Many other players before him had visited Europe with a growing reputation only to find they were unable to use their skills and dominate in the faster style of play in Europe. Many, too, had returned to Rio and Sao Paulo never to be seen again. But if Brazil's results on this tour were not particularly impressive, it was clear that several newcomers had real potential, amongst them Carlos Alberto, Tostao and Rivelino.

Rivelino's left foot was indeed gifted. He was quick, too; decisive in his passing, exciting in his dribbling ability — an intelligent, constructive footballer with elegance and an instinct for creating the goal chance, though he seldom scored himself. At that time, however, Rivelino lined up at inside-left, the position he had occupied throughout his climb through the junior teams of Corinthians FC.

Preference

This meant that however much Rivelino might develop in the following 18 months it was unlikely that he would appear as a first choice in the 1970 World Cup in Mexico, for who could imagine him gaining preference over Pele and Gerson — Brazil's outstanding inside-forwards of world class.

So it transpired, for if Aimore Moreira had given up his job for the 1970 World Cup qualifying matches which Brazil played in July and August of 1969 under Joao Saldanha, the new boss was just as much an adherent of 4-2-2 as his predecessor and, equally, an admirer of both Pele and Gerson. Rivelino was in the squad but looked upon at that time as nothing more than a very useful reserve—a stand-in for Gerson.

Brazil qualified for the last sixteen without Rivelino even getting one touch of the ball in match play. By this time, however, there was considerable activity going on behind the scenes within the Confederacao Brasileira de Desports, and the outcome of it all was the dismissal of Saldanha and the appointment of former left-wing star Jorge Mario Zagallo.

The appointment of Zagallo was critical for Rivelino, for here was a man with unBrazilian ideas. His first heresy was to reject the 4-2-4 system Brazil had perfected and christened, preferring the European's 4-3-3, but in addition he also recognised that the prime reason for the humiliations of 1966 stemmed, apart from tactical backwardness, from the conviction that skill and talent alone could master the physically stronger though less skilled Europeans.

As a result the Brazilians spent almost three months on preparing their players physically, and for the supporters of Rivelino this was a revelation. Retaining all his old skill and flair Rivelino was now chunky, far stockier than before and more robust.

The new Rivelino now exhibited considerably thicker thighs, and there was a snap and decision about his tackling that had been absent before. The talented but almost wistful inside-forward who had ghosted through games now became a bundle of energy, a human dynamo that hummed through matches, winning balls and pushing them forward to well-placed colleagues and frequently bursting forward to help press the final assault on goal himself.

Finally, Zagallo cast Rivelino for the old withdrawn left-winger role that Zagallo himself had filled with distinction for Brazil, enabling Pele, Gerson and Rivelino to play together for the first time. If Rivelino owed a great deal to the new Brazilian team-chief he certainly repaid this debt with interest, and in the Mexico World Cup it was he who largely dominated the midfield regions.

Distribution

Challenging, tackling, foraging for the ball, Rivelino kept the skilful Brazilian strikers well supplied with ammunition, and the steady stream of balls which Rivelino prodded forward invariably had a quality that was generally lacking in the distribution of his equally hard-working colleague on the right flank, Clodoaldo.

Basically Rivelino's tasks looked formidable. With Clodoaldo filling the gap between defence and attack on the right, and Gerson withdrawn deeper than usual to a position only just in front of the Brazilian defence, Rivelino had to fill the left midfield role — a combined left-half - cum - inside-left game that the illustrious Didi had performed with such distinction in earlier tournaments. But, in addition, Rivelino was also to move forward at frequent, regular intervals to provide a stream of accurate centres from the left-wing.

Rivelino fulfilled this secondary role as Zagallo had done before him, moving up from his withdrawn position in support of Tostao or Pele to receive short passes played out towards the left-wing — and return them promptly and accurately into the centre. From many of those accurate early crosses from Rivelino the Brazilian spearheads were to create goal-scoring opportunities.

The confidence that Zagallo placed in Rivelino was clearly demonstrated when he began to take free-kicks in Mexico. They had clearly been well-rehearsed, and it is significant that Rivelino took more direct free-kicks than Pele. In one of the early qualifying matches against Czechoslovakia, Rivelino was to score from a direct free-kick with a manoeuvre that shattered all the Czechs and not least their experienced goalkeeper, Viktor.

Contemplating

With the Czech defenders busily constructing their defensive wall—six men spread out just inside their own penalty area—Pele retrieved the ball and placed it in the appropriate spot and stood contemplating what to do with his shot. Viktor, both eyes on Pele, was completely bewildered when Rivelino ran from the area covered by the Czech defensive wall to shoot, hard and accurately—low down to Viktor's right hand.

This manoeuvre was repeated with a slight variation in a later game against Peru, ending once more with a powerful left-foot shot from Rivelino, but this time the ball struck the left-hand post and bounced to safety, much to the relief of the bemused Peruvian goalkeeper, Rubinos.

Earlier in that same game against Peru, Rivelino had opened the scoring with a fine left-foot shot, picked off after an error by Campos, the Peru right-back. Play had built up on the right flank through Clodoaldo, Gerson and Jairzinho and culminated with a high centre from the right-wing. The ball flew across the Peruvian penalty area to Campos, who headed the ball down and then attempting to follow up and clear had slipped. This gave Rivelino just half-a-yard advantage, and it was all he needed. From his support position just beyond the penalty area, Rivelino had been looking for a half clearance or the chance to shoot from a pass laid back from a Brazilian front player. Now, as Campos slipped, Rivelino stepped forward to measure his shot and send the ball

> **"If Rivelino owed a great deal to the new Brazilian team chief, he certainly repaid his debt with interest, and in the Mexico World Cup it was he who largely dominated the midfield"**

WORLD SOCCER, January, 1972 · SEVENTEEN

LES FOR ERTO

Player Portrait of RIVELINO by Eric Batty

screaming across the penalty area where it went into goal off the foot of the far post!

Perhaps Rivelino's most memorable contribution in his orthodox left-wing role was reserved for the final tie against Italy and the climactic last goal that gave Brazil a 4-1 win. With Clodoaldo dribbling the ball across-field from right to left, Rivelino took up a support position on him, slightly deeper and to the left. As Clodoaldo moved left so did Rivelino so that he was constantly perfectly placed to receive an easy pass. After a run of perhaps 40 yards Clodoaldo finally released the ball, and there was Rivelino in an orthodox left-wing position. With the ball on its way to his feet, Rivelino looked across the field to find a suitably placed target, and there in the middle of the Italian half was Pele, marked—but only loosely.

Opponent

Rivelino's first-time cross found Pele's feet, and the Santos star turned, feinted to beat his oncoming opponent and then flicked the ball forward and to the right. His angled pass was exactly right for with the ball on its way to Pele, right-back Carlos Alberto had moved upfield to overlap Pele on the right-wing, and sprinting forward into unoccupied space he caught up with the ball just on the edge of the Italian penalty. From there, Carlos Alberto's tremendous cross-shot found the Italian net to bring the 1970 World Cup to a fitting climax.

Since then Rivelino's exploits with his club, Corinthians FC, have become legend, and according to the club President: "Rivelino is creating a new public of his own". "This was in response to critics who asked was he worth the terms of his recently signed two-year contract that gives him, with signing-on bonus, salary and other bonuses an estimated 1,000 Cruzeiros a week, or approximately £82 a day.

This, apparently, is a figure second only to that earned by Pele, and if the critics think he is being overpaid let them reflect that Rivelino is one of the very few Brazilian players who will be an automatic choice when they come to defend their world title in 1974, and still in his early twenties, he will be around for many years yet.

Also in this issue...

p4
Internazionale and Italy full-back Giacinto Facchetti commented on his side's recent European Cup tie with Borussia Monchengladbach. He said it had been spoilt by violence on and off the pitch, poor refereeing and sterile tactics that had contributed, as *World Soccer* put it, to "one of the most degrading European spectacles in living memory." The Italian said: "I firmly believe that if this increasing trend to violence is not stopped, the European Cup will be dead and buried within three years."

p24
John Sparrow reported on a long unbeaten home run that had come to an end in Holland, writing: "The 50,000 fans in the Rotterdam 'Kuip' could not quite grasp it. Dutch champions Feyenoord had lost at home. Not since the nightmare of December 17, 1967, when Xerxes DHC of Delft stormed to victory, had the mighty Rotterdammers fallen on home ground."

p25
Having failed to find the net himself during West Germany's 3-1 victory away to Poland in Warsaw, Gerd Muller remained stuck on 42 international goals – which left him one behind Uwe Seeler's all-time German record of 43. According to Arthur Rotmil, during the match, "Gerd was reduced to a few shots, such was the tight marking and deep covering of the Polish rear-guard".

p26-27
In a feature on Manchester City's manager Malcolm Allison, Martin Rogers commented: "[Allison's] current publicity for the team is not just sky blue but sky high. This, he says, will be the finest team Manchester City fans have ever had. 'It may take another year or 18 months,' he remarks. 'It could have come together this year if I had been able to buy Rodney Marsh from Queen's Park Rangers when I wanted to. It will happen'."

10 years ago

Bruno Metsu led UAE to Gulf Cup success, on home soil, for the first time in their history. Appointed in 2006, the former Senegal boss, who had been coaching club sides in the Gulf region, oversaw a 1-0 win against Oman in the Final.

20 years ago

In Italy, Lazio president Dino Zoff took over as coach for a second time after the club sacked previous incumbent Zdenek Zeman. Elsewhere, defender Franco Baresi made his 700th appearance for Milan, in a 1-1 draw away to Cagliari.

30 years ago

French club Saint-Etienne were embroiled in a tax fraud and slush fund case. Investigating magistrate Patrick Desmure named 20 people who were being charged with complicity in the case, including Patrick Battiston and Michel Platini.

40 years ago

Two years after taking Leeds United to a replay in the FA Cup, non-league Wimbledon were at it again. Playing at home to Middlesbrough in the third round, they had a goal disallowed in a 0-0 draw before losing the replay 1-0.

50 years ago

The South American Championship – the forerunner to the Copa America – was staged in Uruguay. Although Brazil and Peru both withdrew from the tournament, the hosts eventually triumphed with a 1-0 win against Argentina.

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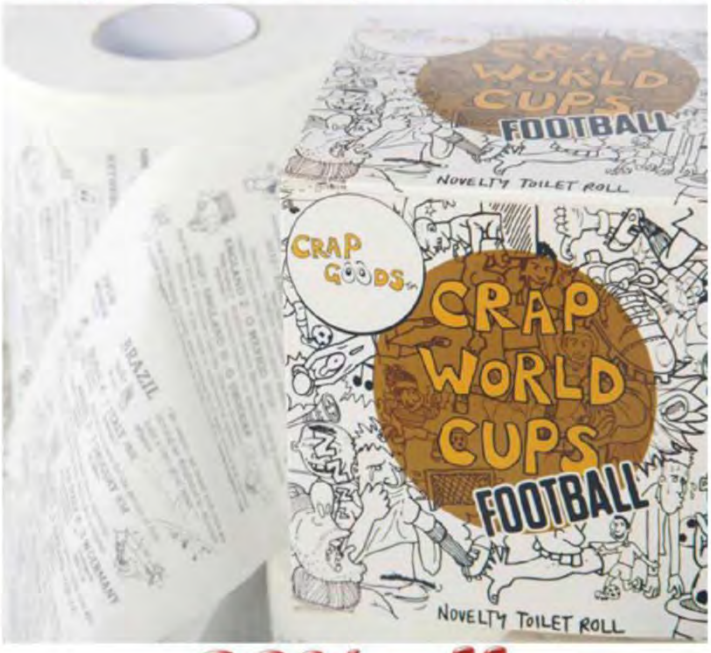

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STEVE MENARY — Zimbabwe — 87

PLUS

Champions...Palmeiras 82

REVIEW

76 Club World Cup
80 Europa League
92 South American league round-up

DIARY

86 Comprehensive global news

INTERNATIONAL & CLUB FOOTBALL

94 Results, tables, fixtures

Victorious... Seattle Sounders 84

Club World Cup

GAVIN HAMILTON

Real crowned champions

Year ends perfectly for Ronaldo

Cristiano Ronaldo hailed "the perfect end" to a trophy-laden 2016 after his hat-trick sealed the Club World Cup title for Real Madrid as they came from behind to beat Kashima Antlers. The new World Player of the Year scored from the penalty spot and then twice more in extra-time as a tiring Madrid finally got the better of the Japanese underdogs 4-2 in Yokohama.

Kashima qualified for the tournament as the host nation's champions and had not been expected to progress to the Final. However, they beat African and South American opposition on their way to a showdown with the European champions.

Madrid's victory completed a clean sweep of trophies for Ronaldo, following victory in the Champions League, Euro 2016 and the European Super Cup. And the intercontinental triumph in Japan followed individual acclaim for the Portuguese star, as UEFA's Best Player in Europe, *World Soccer*'s World Player of the Year and winner of *France Football*'s Ballon d'Or.

Ronaldo, who was voted man of the match in the Final, said: "I didn't think it would end like this: winning the final, scoring three goals and helping Real Madrid. I'd like to thank my team-mates yet again, because I cannot win individual trophies without them."

For Madrid, it was their second Club World Cup triumph in three years and the fourth world club title in their history.

And yet, despite the accolades for Ronaldo, there were also the doubts. He stuttered and struggled to make an impact on the game in the first half, when he was outshone by his team-mate Karim Benzema.

Ronaldo hit back at the detractors, while referring to himself in the first person. "Everyone always expects more from Cristiano, I always give my best and if I can't do it it's because I'm unable," he said.

"People often talk too much, but I'm used to that. I show my quality on the pitch and nothing has gone badly. I have kept my level of performance as high as possible over the last 10 years. I want to keep working and enjoy my football, that is what I love the most.

"The statistics don't lie. I am really happy, I've had a great season personally and as part of a team."

The Final looked as if it would be a stroll for Madrid. Their early domination of possession led to the opening goal in the ninth minute for Benzema, who pounced on the rebound after Luka Modric's volley was parried by Kashima keeper Masatoshi Sogahata.

Madrid continued to dominate but Ronaldo was not on his game, missing the target with a header from a corner and then skying a free-kick over the bar.

And Kashima struck back with a counter-attack on the cusp of half-time. Gaku Shibasaki was on hand to meet Shoma Doi's cross after it was missed by Raphael Varane and the Kashima striker flashed a volley past Keylor Navas to level the scores going into the break.

Madrid started the second half positively but it was the

CLUB WORLD CUP RESULTS

FIRST ROUND
Kashima Antlers 2 Auckland City 1

QUARTER-FINALS
Jeonbuk 1 Club America 2
Mamelodi Sundowns 0 Kashima Antlers 2

FIFTH-PLACE PLAY-OFF
Jeonbuk 4 Mamelodi Sundowns 1

SEMI-FINALS
Kashima Antlers 3 Atletico Nacional 1
Club America 0 Real Madrid 2

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF
Atletico Nacional 2 Club America 2
(At Nacional win 4-3 on pens)

FINAL
Real Madrid 4 Kashima Antlers 2 (aet)

Collision....Madrid goalkeeper Keylor Navas clatters into team-mate Sergio Ramos and Kashima's Fabricio

Winners...Madrid are champions once more

Japanese who took the lead. Shibasaki hammered a low drive into the net from 20 yards after Madrid captain Sergio Ramos had mis-hooked a clearance from near the corner flag towards the edge of his own box. Ramos had made the bizarre individual error but Madrid's other defenders compounded a tricky situation by backing off and allowing Shibasaki the space to shoot.

Kashima's second goal was against the run of play and it knocked Madrid into life. Whereas in the semi-final against Atletico Nacional of Colombia, Kashima had defended doggedly after taking a surprise lead, here they could not contain Madrid's star men when they stepped up to the plate.

Zambian referee Janny Sikazwe declined demands from Kashima players to consult a video replay when their captain Shuto Yamamoto clattered Lucas Vasquez in the area. It was a clear penalty and the spot-kick was dispatched by Ronaldo.

Despite their superiority, Madrid almost made life difficult for themselves. Navas fell to the ground after a Harald Schumacher-esque clash with Ramos, while Ronaldo missed a number of chances to seal the game in normal time. He was offside when turning in a rebound from Benzema's volley and then headed over from close range from a Vasquez cross. And when through on goal Sogahata did well to save with his feet.

Benzema placed a diving header over the bar as the long-distance travel appeared to be taking its toll on Madrid's fitness levels.

Indeed, it was Kashima's Yasushi Endo, sending a volley wide, who missed a great chance to win the match before the end of normal time.

Ramos was lucky to stay on the pitch after his cynical foul on Mu Kanazaki broke up a Kashima counter. Madrid's captain had already been booked and the referee reached for his pocket before checking and then deciding against a card as Ramos raced away from the scene of the crime.

The decision incensed the Kashima players and Madrid, despite their tiring legs, dug deep in extra-time to carve out a victory. Ronaldo put them ahead in the 97th minute, finally finding the target after being played through by Benzema.

Then Ronaldo grabbed Madrid's fourth, reacting the quickest to Toni Kroos' scuffed shot and adjusting his feet to fire home and claim the first hat-trick in a world club final since Pele for Santos against Benfica in 1962.

"It was a game with a lot of suffering," Ronaldo said. "We did not expect them to play so well. But Finals are like this, you must suffer."

Kashima's fans were noisy and animated throughout but in the end the gulf in class proved too much. Their team had not expected to reach the Final but they built on an early win over Oceania champions Auckland City.

After overcoming African champions Mamelodi Sundowns, they faced far trickier opponents in Atletico Nacional in the semi-final.

The Colombians had the lion's share of the play but never recovered from the penalty – the first to be awarded using video replay technology – which gave Kashima the lead.

The Japanese champions then completed a successful rearguard action, defending their single-goal lead for most of the second half before Endo added the second with a clever backheel following an error by goalkeeper Franco Armani and substitute Yuma Suzuki sidefooted home a third from close range after Mu Kanazaki's ball across the face of goal.

Battle...Jeonbuk Motors' Choi Chul-soon (far right) takes on Darwin Quintero of Club America

Nacional retained a semblance of pride by beating Mexico's Club America on penalties in the third-place play-off. Atletico's players insisted on hanging around until after the Final to collect their bronze medals.

Club America, the CONCACAF champions, were edged out by Real Madrid in the other semi-final, with Karim Benzema's shot on the stroke of half-time proving to be the difference.

Ronaldo added a second in injury time when referee Enrique Caceres briefly asked for a video assistant consultation before allowing the goal to stand and send Madrid into the Final and the chance to end the year on an historic high. WS

Video tech makes its mark

History was made at the Club World Cup when video technology was used for the first time in a FIFA tournament – and there were two major incidents.

In the semi-final between Kashima Antlers and Atletico Nacional, Kashima were awarded a penalty after an off-the-ball push at a corner. Referee Viktor Kassai stopped the game after being alerted to the incident by his assistant and gave a penalty after viewing footage on a monitor.

It took approximately two minutes from the time of the push to the awarding of the penalty, which was converted by Shoma Doi.

In the second semi-final, Paraguayan referee Enrique Caceres awarded a goal to Real Madrid, but Club America players protested that Cristano Ronaldo was offside.

Caceres made a "charades" type signal of a TV screen to the "video assistance referee" (VAR) and did not view the incident on the monitor himself before restarting the game and awarding the goal.

The future...video technology to aid the officials

Afterwards, Real Madrid midfielder Luka Modric said of video technology in the after-match press conference: "We had a meeting with the refs the other day. I did not listen too much as I don't expect it to continue.

"It is something new. To be honest, I don't like it.

"It creates a lot of confusion."

Champions League

GAVIN HAMILTON

Tired and uninspiring

Few surprises as continent's big beasts progress

A tired and uninspiring format produced few surprises in the group stage of the Champions League as the continent's "big beasts" had little difficulty in cruising through to the next phase. And there was little value in finishing top either, with Manchester City, Bayern Munich and Real Madrid all finishing second but none the worse for it when it came to the knockout draw.

The exception were Paris Saint-Germain, who finished behind Arsenal and now face Barcelona. Arsenal's reward for topping their group – for the first time since 2011 – is a meeting with Bayern.

In seven of the eight groups, the two wealthiest sides went through, with the exception being Bayer Leverkusen, who triumphed at the expense of Tottenham Hotspur. That group was also the only one in which the top two seeds did not progress.

What surprises there were took place on the margins, with eastern European sides Ludogorets, Rostov, Legia Warsaw defying their wealthier competitors to finish third in their respective groups and progress to the Europa League knockout stage.

GROUP A

Arsenal ultimately had PSG to thank for top spot after a 2-2 draw at the Emirates in their penultimate group game left the French champions in pole position going into the last round of matches.

But PSG failed to beat Bulgaria's Ludogorets in their final game, drawing 2-2 at Parc des Princes after a last-minute equaliser from Angel Di Maria.

Arsenal claimed top spot after beating a disappointing Basle side 4-1 with a hat-trick for Spanish striker Lucas Perez on a rare start.

Ludogorets enter the Europa League with third place, their best performance in the competition.

GROUP B

Napoli and Benfica met in the final group game, with the winner set to go through alongside Besiktas, who were a point behind and playing the already eliminated Dynamo Kiev

But Andriy Yarmolenko starred for Dynamo in a 6-0 thrashing as Besiktas, down to nine men, blew their chance in spectacular style.

Napoli won 2-1 in Lisbon to take top spot as second-half substitute Dries Mertens changed the match. The Belgium international set up the opener for Jose Callejon on the hour mark before scoring the winner as both sides went through.

GROUP C

It says a great deal about Barcelona's dominance of the group that Lionel Messi scored 10 goals in the six games but was disappointed that he failed to match Cristiano Ronaldo's record of 11 group goals.

Barca opened with an emphatic 7-0 defeat of Celtic at Camp Nou and were in cruise control for the remaining games – with the exception of a 3-1 defeat at Manchester City.

City were held away from home by Borussia Monchengladbach and Celtic – a thrilling 3-3 at Parkhead. They also drew 1-1 with Celtic in their final game after fielding a second-string side.

GROUP D

Bayern Munich began with a 5-0 defeat of Champions League debutants Rostov, but then suffered defeats away to Atletico Madrid and Rostov.

Atletico beat Bayern in Madrid thanks to Yannick Ferreira Carrasco's goal as Antoine Griezmann missed a late penalty, while Rostov stunned Bayern 3-2 in freezing conditions at Rostov's Olimp-2 stadium with Christian Noboa's second-half free-kick sealing the win.

Bayern's impressive home form carried them through to the knockout stage, and victory over Atletico in their final game took their run to 15 straight Champions League home victories.

However, Atletico still topped the group, with Rostov going into the Europa League and winless PSV bottom.

GROUP E

Monaco and Bayer Leverkusen went through at the expense of Tottenham Hotspur, who struggled to assert themselves at their temporary home of Wembley, only winning their final game against CSKA, for whom coach Leonid Slutsky quit afterwards.

Leverkusen drew four of their six games, while Monaco's supremacy in the group was confirmed by their

Appeal...Arsenal's Aaron Ramsey goes down after a challenge from PSG's Thiago Silva

Going through... Juventus' Juan Cuadrado stops Vitolo of Sevilla

Review

2-1 win over Spurs on the fifth matchday.

Spurs were left ruing their poor levels of concentration when Monaco took the lead for a second time, less than a minute after Harry Kane's penalty had levelled the score, with the unmarked Thomas Lemar turning in Djibril Sidibe's cross just 16 seconds after the restart.

GROUP F

Borussia Dortmund set a new scoring record for the group stage of the competition with 21 goals, and much of that tally came courtesy of the 8-4 victory over Legia Warsaw – the highest scoreline in the history of the Champions League group phase.

Legia also conceded five away to Real Madrid and were then involved in a thrilling 3-3 draw in the return, which was played in an empty stadium in Warsaw as punishment for the violent behaviour of fans in the earlier clash with Dortmund. Legia even led 3-2 until Mateo Kovacic spared Madrid's blushes with an equaliser five minutes from time.

Madrid would have won the group had they held onto the 2-0 lead they held over Dortmund in their final group game. Karim Benzema's brace had put the home side in a commanding position, but Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang dragged Dortmund back into the game on the hour mark before Marco Reus scored an 88th-minute leveller to ensure Dortmund finished top.

First...Monaco score against Spurs

ROUND OF 16 DRAW

Manchester City v Monaco
Real Madrid v Napoli
Benfica v Borussia Dortmund
Bayern Munich v Arsenal
Porto v Juventus
Bayer Leverkusen v Atletico Madrid
Paris Saint-Germain v Barcelona
Sevilla v Leicester City

First legs to be played on 14 & 15 and 21 & 22 February 2017; second legs on 7 & 8 and 14 & 15 March

GROUP G

Debutants Leicester City set a new Champions League record, keeping clean sheets in their first four group games. They also became the first English club to win their opening three games of the group stage.

Record signing Islam Slimani, with a header, scored the only goal of the home victory over Porto. But the Portuguese side exposed their lack of strength in depth with a 5-0 drubbing of a second-string City in the return.

Bottom side Club Brugge were one of only two teams to finish pointless in the group stage.

GROUP H

Italian champions Juventus opened with a goalless draw against Sevilla but faced little trouble thereafter.

Points were dropped at home to Lyon, drawing 1-1, but Juve confirmed top spot in the group with a 3-1 win on the penultimate matchday at Sevilla, who were forced to play almost an hour with 10 men following Franco Vazquez's red card. Late goals from Leonardo Bonucci and Mario Mandzukic sealed the win after Nicolas Pareja's early goal for Sevilla. WS

Europa League

NICK BIDWELL

Hapoel lead the upsets

Israeli champions among the surprises in the group stage

In contrast to the same old faces in the Champions League group stage, the Europa League produced several upsets, as well as some fine performances from sides who will now have every confidence of competing with the Champions League rejects who join the knockout stage.

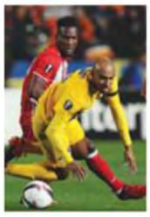
Chief among the surprise packages were Israeli champions Hapoel Be'er Sheva, who had knocked Olympiakos out in the Champions League qualifiers and given Celtic a fright before losing 5-4 on aggregate. After winning their first Israeli title for 40 years, the team from southern Israel stunned Internazionale both home and away. First, they triumphed 2-0 at San Siro in their opening group game to record their first European win in 19 years. Then, in the return, they won 3-2 with an injury-time goal from former Chelsea trainee Ben Sahar after the Italians had raced into a two-goal lead in the opening 25 minutes.

On the final matchday, against Southampton, Hapoel squeezed through by the tightest of margins. Maor Buzaglo's 78th-minute goal was cancelled out by Virgil Van Dijk's injury-time header but Hapoel reached the next phase by virtue of having scored an away goal at Southampton's expense.

However, Sparta Prague turned the form book completely upside down in **Group K**, beating Hapoel home and away to finish top, with Inter, who sacked coach Frank De Boer, bottom.

In another surprise, APOEL of Cyprus finished top of **Group B**. A 1-0 win at Olympiakos on the second matchday was their first away win in European competition and a 2-0 victory over the Greek champions in the final group game secured their place in the last 32 for the first time.

Olympiakos edged out Swiss side Young Boys from second place in the group thanks to an opening-game win in Berne, where Argentinian midfielder Esteban Cambiasso scored the game's only goal.



Surprise...APOEL defender Carlao (in yellow)

Tough...Schalke (in blue) and Salzburg

Turkish side Osmanlispor, making their competition debut, were the underdogs in **Group L** but pulled off a surprise win over Villarreal in the crucial group game, Romanian forward Raul Rusescu grabbing a late winner, and then squeezed through as group winners on 10 points. After the Spanish side drew their penultimate game, 1-1 away to Zurich, they were left needing to beat Steaua. Osmanispior, having lost at Steaua in their penultimate game, beat Zurich to top the group, while Villarreal snatched a late winner over Steaua when Manu Trigueros lobbed goalkeeper Florin Nita from the edge of the box three minutes from time to secure a 2-1 victory.

Schalke, competing in the competition 20 years on from their UEFA Cup Final triumph over Internazionale, were one of the form teams of the group stage, winning their first five games in **Group I** and conceding just three goals. They lost only their final game, to Salzburg, when coach Markus Weinzierl fielded a weakened side.

In contrast, Nice, the surprise league leaders in France, were unable to replicate their Ligue 1 form in the continental competition, losing home and away to Schalke and going down 5-2 away to Russian side Krasnodar, who took second place ahead of Salzburg.

Schalke's form was eclipsed by the **Group H** winners Shakhtar Donetsk, under former Braga boss Paulo Fonseca who replaced the long-serving Mircea Lucescu last summer. Shakhtar were again forced to play in Lviv – 1,270km from Donetsk – because of the security situation in eastern Ukraine, but they still won six games out of six, with 21 goals making them the competition's top scorers.

Shakhtar put 10 past Gent, winning 5-0 at home and 5-3 in Belgium. They also scored four without reply against Konyaspor and then beat Fonseca's former side Braga 4-2 in their final game – a result that would deny the Portuguese side a place in the knockout stage because Kalifa Coulibaly scored a 93rd-minute winner for Gent against Konyaspor to ensure the Belgians went through in second place.

Dundalk, after becoming the first Irish side to win a group match when they beat Maccabi Tel Aviv, slumped to four successive defeats and finished bottom.

Lucescu's new side Zenit were in fine form in **Group D** and after successive wins they could afford to lose their final game to AZ of Holland, who went through as group runners-up at the expense of Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Roma were one of four teams – with Shakhtar, Ajax and Saint-Etienne – to remain unbeaten in the group stage. The Italian side comfortably topped **Group E**, while Romanian champions Astra, conquerors of West Ham United in the qualifying rounds, finished ahead of Viktoria Plzen and Austria Vienna.

Saint-Etienne topped **Group C** after going all six

Decisive...Hapoel Be'er Sheva celebrate Maor Buzaglo's goal at Southampton

games unbeaten. They scored a late equaliser in both of their opening games, away at Mainz and home to Anderlecht, before home and away wins against Azerbaijan's Qabala, who were the only team to finish the group stage with zero points.

Ajax were unbeaten in **Group G** and confirmed top spot with a game to spare with a 2-0 win over Panathinaikos, while closest challengers Celta Vigo, who had lost 3-2 in Amsterdam, were held by Standard Liege. Panathinaikos, the 1971 European Cup runners-up, finished bottom of the group, with just one point.

Other successes included Fenerbahce who topped **Group A** at the expense of Manchester United. That was despite losing 4-1 to United at Old Trafford when the Turkish side conceded two soft penalties. But a fortnight later in Istanbul, Fener gained revenge, winning 2-1 with a great volleyed goal from Moussa Sow after 65 seconds and a fine second-half free-kick from Jeremain Lens.

United's defeat in Istanbul and in their opening game loss to Feyenoord meant the group went to the wire. But Feyenoord, the Dutch league leaders, blew their chance of reaching the last 32 when they lost at home to Fenerbahce, while United carved out a 2-0 victory over Zorya in freezing conditions in Ukraine.

Any suggestions that United boss Jose Mourinho would not take the competition seriously were dispelled as world-record signing Paul Pogba started all six matches, with Zlatan Ibrahimovic and captain Wayne Rooney called upon to make important contributions. That was especially so in the home win over Feyenoord, when Rooney became United's record European goalscorer, scoring his 39th goal in a 4-0 win.

Fiorentina took top place in **Group J** with a final-day win over Qarabag in Azerbaijan. The Italian side were run close by Greece's PAOK, who won 3-2 in Florence in the penultimate game thanks to Garry Rodrigues' injury-time goal. It was the Thessaloniki club's first ever victory on Italian soil.

Genk topped **Group F** despite losing 5-3 to Bilbao, with Athletic's Aritz Aduriz scoring all five goals – a new record for the Europa League. The Belgian side still topped the group after winning their final game, 2-0 over Italian debutants Sassuolo, while Athletic could only draw their final game away at Rapid Vienna. WS

KNOCKOUT STAGE DRAW

Athletic Bilbao v APOEL
Legia Warsaw v Ajax
Anderlecht v Zenit
Astra Giurgiu v Genk
Manchester United v Saint-Etienne
Villarreal v Roma
Ludogorets v Copenhagen
Celta Vigo v Shakhtar Donetsk
Olympiakos v Osmanlispor
Gent v Tottenham Hotspur
Rostov v Sparta Prague
Krasnodar v Fenerbahce
Borussia Monchengladbach v Fiorentina
AZ v Lyon
Hapoel Be'er Sheva v Besiktas
PAOK v Schalke

First leg to be played on February16
Second leg to be played on February 22/23

Brazil: Serie A

TIM VICKERY

Palmeiras all the way

Title victory confirms the return of a traditional powerhouse

They scored the most goals, conceded the fewest, topped the table from the ninth to the 16th round, and again from the 19th to the end, and, in finishing nine points ahead of their closest challengers, Palmeiras were emphatic winners of the 2016 Brazilian championship.

The team with its roots in Sao Paulo's Italian community had not won the league since 1994, and spent 2003 and 2013 in the second division. So this title was confirmation of the return of a giant.

The outgoing president, millionaire Paulo Nobre, had loaned money to the club on favourable terms and they completely rebuilt their stadium, which by popular consensus is the best of Brazil's new grounds. With the crowds flocking in, they were the only club in the top flight with an average attendance of over 30,000.

Palmeiras won the domestic cup at the end of 2015, but on the field things really picked up after coach Cuca took over the following April. With the club in the process of crashing out at the group stage of the Libertadores Cup, he decided it was time to make changes.

Instead of playing Gabriel Jesus out wide and asking him to chase after the opposing full-back, Cuca put him at centre-forward. The defence was bolstered by giant Colombian centre-back Yerry Mina and the rest of the team fell into place, with 42-year-old ex-international midfielder Ze Roberto also being employed in his original position of left-back. The captaincy was handed to winger Dudu and he blossomed with the responsibility, while Moises and Tche Tche proved to be a dynamic midfield duo. And when goalkeeper Fernando Prass picked up a serious injury, the experienced Jailson proved a more than capable deputy.

The longer the season wore on, the more the relative virtues of the team were in evidence. The 44 points they accumulated in the second half of the campaign smashed previous records, and their final haul of 80 was only one short of the high established a year ago by Corinthians. Palmeiras also exhibited a much wider repertoire of attacking options than their rivals – which is both a comment on their efficiency and the weakness of the chasing pack.

> Palmeiras won the domestic cup at the end of 2015, but things really picked up after coach Cuca took over

For a while it looked as if Palmeiras and Flamengo would contest a two-horse race. But forced to live out a nomadic existence and play almost the entire season without a home due to financial reconstruction, Flamengo dropped off in the closing stages.

Having replaced coach Muricy Ramalho with Ze Ricardo, Flamengo never truly clicked enough to get the best out of centre-forward Paolo Guerrero, and in the end they were pipped to second place by Santos, who could perhaps look back on the campaign with mixed feelings. On the one hand, Dorival Junior's team were once again let down by a poor away record, losing nearly half their games on the road; on the other, they did well to overcome the loss of key players to both the Copa Centenario and the Olympic tournament.

There would seem little doubt that fourth-place Atletico Mineiro should have done better. With Fred, Robinho, Argentina's Lucas Pratto and Ecuador's Juan Cazares they were overflowing in attacking talent. But coach Marcelo Oliveira could never get the balance right and there was too much space between the lines, which caused the defence to suffer. Oliveira was sacked after the first leg of the Cup Final when Atletico lost 3-1 at home to Gremio, and a 1-1 draw in the return gave Gremio a trophy to make up for their loss of league form.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the season was the fifth place achieved by newly promoted Botafogo. They had been widely seen as relegation candidates and were

Dramatic...Flamengo's Diego in action against Botafogo

Deserved... Palmeiras celebrate

Review

still in the bottom four at the half way stage. But the team took off after Jair Ventura – son of club legend Jairzinho – became coach. With a cautious but well-executed game they made steady progress up the table.

America and Santa Cruz, who came up with Botafogo a year ago, went straight back down, with Figueirense, who had been promoted in 2014. Almost unbelievably they will be joined in the second tier next term by a club who were club world champions just a decade ago.

Cup winner...Miller Bolanos of Gremio

Internacional prided themselves in never having been relegated, and they appeared to believe – until it was too late – that it could not possibly happen. The Porto Alegre giants even topped the table for some of the early rounds, but then collapsed as the consequences of bad management, frequent coaching changes and strange signings kicked in.

On the pitch, the players looked helplessly lost by the end of the year; off it, the directors were even worse. There was much anger when, in the wake of the Chapecoense disaster, the club referred to the possibility of relegation as a tragedy. That, and insistent attempts to argue that another team had fielded an ineligible player, are actions clearly unworthy of such an institution.

Another giant of the Brazilian game, Vasco da Gama, will replace them in Serie A, along with Bahia, Avai and second division champions Atletico Goianiense.

Palmeiras, Gremio and Sudamerica winners Chapecoense will be joined in the Libertadores along with Santos, Flamengo, Atletico Mineiro, Botafogo and Atletico Paranaense, while Corinthians, Ponte Preta, Sao Paulo, Cruzeiro, Fluminense and Sport all go into the 2017 Sudamericana Cup. WS

BEST OF SEASON

● PLAYER
Gabriel Jesus (Palmeiras)
Started the campaign in a blaze of goals, which slowed down in the second half of the season when he seemed to be saving them for the national team.

● COACH
Caio Junior (Chapecoense)
Organised a team that became the first Brazilian club in three years to reach a continental Final. Died along with his team in the air disaster.

● NEWCOMER
William Pottker (Ponte Preta)
That a rookie striker playing for one of the least glamorous clubs could finish as joint-top scorer is an achievement that deserves wider attention.

USA

PAUL GARDNER

Onwards and upwards

A poor Final could not disguise the progress made by MLS

The skies are blue and the sun continues to shine for Major League Soccer. Commissioner Don Garber's annual "State of the League" address has reached the point where, every year, it sounds too good to be true. New teams are added, more spectators are turning up, the net worth of each team grows, and so on.

But this is not just standard marketing talk; these are real achievements.

In 2017, MLS will play its 22nd season. That is remarkable when compared to its predecessor, the North American Soccer League (NASL), home of the world-famous New York Cosmos, which lasted just 17 years before it disintegrated.

While MLS has been able to benefit from the straggly roots put down by the NASL, those roots have been nourished by the US Soccer Federation and grown into a massive nationwide youth-soccer movement. This has meant the game is now an integral part of many community activities.

And where NASL clubs played in borrowed and temporarily converted – and usually far too large – gridiron or baseball stadiums, virtually all of MLS' 20 clubs have their own stadiums – permanent homes, situated in the communities, from which they draw their fans.

An ongoing irritation for Garber and MLS owners have been the accusations constantly levelled at the league that it is an elephant's graveyard, where older players come to play a restful year or so at the end of their careers. It is a reputation that MLS can do without, but one which its own recruiting has helped foster. But 2016, according to Garber: "The average age of players who were signed in 2016 was 25 – the lowest age of all the newcomers we've had in the last five years."

The young age level was greatly helped by the emergence of two promising young attacking players: Jordan Morris and Jack Harrison – the latter an Englishman who spent his high school years in the US. Both decided to join MLS rather than try their luck in Europe, with Harrison going to New York City FC and Morris joining Seattle Sounders.

And as the youngsters arrived, two of the league's older players, the English duo Frank Lampard and Steven Gerrard, left after brief, undistinguished stays.

In 2016, the average attendance at MLS games rose to a new record of 21,700 – the sixth time in the past seven seasons that the figure has gone up. That figure, according to Garber, is the sixth highest among all professional soccer leagues in the world.

Meanwhile, the value of the average MLS franchise – a measure of what any new investors would have to pay MLS to be awarded a franchise – continues to grow. Ten years ago the figure was $10million; it is now $150m.

> "The average age of players who were signed in 2016 was 25 – the lowest age of all the newcomers we've had in the last five years"
> MLS Commissioner Don Garber

Amid the enveloping euphoria and all the rising financial figures and the upward-pointing graphs, it needs to be pointed out that MLS, as a league, has yet to make a profit, with virtually all of its clubs in the same boat.

Meanwhile, there's the excitement of expansion to occupy MLS minds.

The MLS expansion programme will see the current 20-team league grow to 22 teams in 2017, with the addition of Atlanta United and Minnesota United. In 2018, a second club will open up in LA: Los Angeles FC. Then it is hoped that David Beckham's attempt to launch a club in Miami will finally be successful, although at the moment the move is stalled by the Beckham group's

Promising...Gerardo Martino (right) joins Atlanta United

Joy...Roman Torres (no29) celebrates his championship-winning penalty for Seattle

Disappointing...Toronto's Sebastian Giovinco (left) in the Final

BEST OF SEASON

● **PLAYER**
David Villa (New York City)
Playing his second MLS season, the 35-year-old Spaniard scored 23 goals for his side and gained 26 per cent of the vote for the season's MVP.

● **COACH**
Oscar Pareja (Dallas)
The Colombian oversaw Dallas' best-ever season, ending their 19-year trophy drought with success in the US Open Cup and the Supporters' Shield.

● **NEWCOMER**
Nicolas Lodeiro (Seattle Sounders)
The Uruguayan midfielder only arrived in the summer but had an immediate impact following his move from Boca Juniors.

Review

inability to find a site to build a new stadium.

That MLS should apply its rules about a stadium so stringently to Beckham is puzzling because New York City FC were accepted in 2015 despite not having a stadium. NYC FC have played their first two seasons on a narrow field awkwardly squeezed into the Yankee Stadium baseball ground. And the club has yet to come up with a site on which to build its own stadium.

Assuming Beckham's Miami venture pans out, then MLS will have 24 clubs by 2018. The plan is then to add four more clubs to get the league up to 28 clubs. There is no shortage of venues that want to join MLS and the league has reported interest from investor groups in Charlotte, Cincinnati, Detroit, Nashville, Raleigh/Durham, Sacramento, St Louis, San Antonio, San Diego and Tampa/St Petersburg.

While 28 teams may seem a lot to European observers, it is slightly on the small side for the vast United States as pro basketball and baseball each have 30 teams, while gridiron has 32. Atlanta, one of the expansion teams, have made a promising beginning – and an unusual one for MLS – with the appointment of a Latino coach, the former Argentina and Barcelona coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino.

Martino lost no time in signing young Latino talent in Paraguayan Miguel Almiron and Argentinian Hector Villalba. It was rumoured that another Paraguayan, the talented winger Oscar Romero would also join Atlanta.

Gone...Steven Gerrard is back in England

The idea of a Latin-style team in MLS is not new. Chivas-USA made the attempt between 2005 and 2014, but the team never featured really top talent.

As it gained Martinez, MLS said goodbye to two of its longest-serving coaches. Bruce Arena left Los Angeles Galaxy to take over the US national team – a job he had previously held between 1998 and 2006, while Sigi Schmid, who had been in charge at Seattle Sounders since the club joined MLS in 2009, found himself out of a job in mid-season.

The Championship Final was perhaps the one really negative intrusion into a good MLS year. The game featured Sounders against Toronto, a Canadian team which, like Sounders, had great expectations since its 2007 beginnings, but had never won anything.

Played in Toronto in sub-freezing temperatures, the game was a total disappointment, in which the star players – Toronto's Sebastian Giovinco and Seattle's Nicolas Lodeiro – had no impact at all. The game lumbered into extra-time, then, still at 0-0, to a shoot-out, which Seattle won.

They had their championship at last, but they won it despite failing to have a single shot on target during the entire 120 minutes of play. WS

NOVEMBER 28-DECEMBER 15, 2016

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Monday November 28

COLOMBIA: The plane carrying Brazilian side Chapecoense, who are due to play Atletico Nacional in the first leg of the Sudamericana Cup Final in Medellin on Wednesday, crashes on its approach to the city. Nineteen players and staff are among the 71 who are killed.

Tuesday November 29

BELGIUM: Winners in 2015 and finalists last year, Club Brugge go out of this year's Belgian Cup in the quarter-finals, losing 3-2 at Eupen.
ENGLAND: At 17 years, 45 days, Ben Woodburn becomes Liverpool's youngest-ever goalscorer as they beat Leeds United 2-0 in the League Cup quarter-finals.
JAPAN: Yuki Abe's second-half penalty gives Urawa Red Diamonds a 1-0 lead over Kashima Antlers after their away leg of the J.League Championship Final.
LIBERIA: Domestic cup winners MC Breweries beat league champions Barrack Young Controllers on penalties following a 0-0 draw in the Liberian Super Cup.

Wednesday November 30

AUSTRALIA: Melbourne City claim the first trophy in their seven-year history as Tim Cahill's second-half header gives them a 1-0 victory over Sydney in the Football Federation Australia Cup Final.
ENGLAND: Under-21 boss Gareth Southgate becomes permanent manager of the senior England side after four games as caretaker.
FRANCE: Edinson Cavani scores his 100th goal for Paris Saint-Germain as they beat Angers 2-0 in Ligue 1.
SPAIN: Enzo Zidane, the son of Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane, comes off the subs' bench to make his debut for the club and scores in a 6-1 victory over Leonesa in the Spanish Cup. Third-tier Hercules hold Barcelona to a 1-1 draw.
USA: Toronto become the first Canadian side to reach the MLS Cup Final as a 7-5 aggregate win over Montreal Impact sees them crowned Eastern Conference champions.
VENEZUELA: Zulia surrender a 2-0 first-leg lead to draw 2-2 on aggregate with Deportivo Tachira but triumph on penalties to win the clausura Final.

Thursday December 1

ASIA: Al Ain and UAE midfielder Omar Abdulrahman is named AFC Player of the Year. Shinji Okazaki of Leicester City and Japan is the international player of the year, coach of the year is Jeonbuk Motors' Choi Kang-hee, and 18-year-old Ritsu Doan of Gamba Osaka and Japan is youth player of the year.

Friday December 2

GABON: With 43 days to go until they host the African Nations Cup finals, Gabon appoint former Spain boss Jose Antonio Camacho as national coach.
GERMANY: Arjen Robben scores one and sets up another on his 150th Bundesliga appearance as Bayern Munich win 3-1 at Mainz.
PORTUGAL: Benfica's 23-match unbeaten league run ends with a 2-1 loss at Maritimo.

Saturday December 3

ENGLAND: Chelsea claim their eighth successive Premier League victory, winning 3-1 at Manchester City, who have Sergio Aguero and Fernandinho sent off in injury time.
FRANCE: Lyon's game at Metz is abandoned after 30 minutes as the visitors' goalkeeper, Anthony Lopes, is taken to hospital after a flare explodes next to him.
JAPAN: Kashima Antlers win 2-1 at Urawa Red Diamonds to claim the J.League title on away goals with a 2-2 aggregate draw.
PANAMA: Arabe Unido win a record-extending 15th top-flight title, beating Plaza Amador 2-0, in the Panamanian Liga apertura Final.
SPAIN: Sergio Ramos grabs a 90th-minute equaliser as Real Madrid draw 1-1 at Barcelona in the *Clasico*.
SWITZERLAND: League leaders Basle's 19-game unbeaten run in domestic competition ends with a 3-1 loss away to Young Boys.

Sunday December 4

BELGIUM: Charleroi's home game against Standard Liege is abandoned in the 81st minute, with the visitors winning 3-1, after fans set off fireworks and threw coins, lighters

First silverware...goalscorer Tim Cahill (far left) and Melbourne City lift the FFA Cup after beating Sydney 1-0 in the Final

Dejected...Benfica's unbeaten run is over

and bottles onto the pitch.
ITALY: Roma win 2-0 away to Lazio in a derby played out in front of thousands of empty seats as a large number of their fans protested against security measures.
SOUTH SUDAN: Chabur Goc Alei, who is president of the South Sudan Football Association, is suspended by the board of directors for alleged financial impropriety.

Monday December 5

BRAZIL: Chapecoense are officially awarded the Sudamericana Cup by CONMEBOL after most of their team died in the plane crash en route to play Atletico Nacional in the first leg of the Final in Colombia.
FIFA: Former president Sepp Blatter loses his appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport against a six-year ban from all football activities.
GERMANY: Darmstadt dismiss coach Norbert Meier and sporting director Holger Fach after six straight defeats, including a German Cup ➤

Derby win...Roma's Radja Nainggolan (left)

ZIMBABWE

STEVE MENARY

Recruiting in the UK

Looking overseas for new international prospects

Zimbabwe's appearance at the African Nations Cup in Gabon was always going to be a difficult proposition for the cash-strapped, isolated country. But help is on hand from overseas. And in the United Kingdom, Team Zimbabwe UK (TZUK) is trying to assist, both on and off the pitch

The initiative was formed to support Zimbabwean athletes at the 2012 Olympics, but is increasingly focused on football. Led by chief executive Marshall Gore, the project is trawling the Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK looking for talent.

"Some of our players could easily play in the Premier League back in Zimbabwe," says TZUK's senior team manager Kelvin Mushambe.

Forty five players of Zimbabwean descent aged 23 or under have been found playing football at semi-professional standard or higher, and a side captained by Seth Patrick, who plays for League One side Northampton Town, won the 2016 African Nations Cup UK, a tournament for African diaspora sides.

The project has the backing of many ex-players, including former international Carlos Max and Joe "Kodo" Mugabe of Harare-based side CAPS United.

"We want to help all the youth of Zimbabwe in the UK and also back home," says Mugabe. "Back home, our juniors lack basic things like football cones and even footballs to play the game with."

Mugabe says some teams in Zimbabwe's Premier Soccer League (PSL) cannot afford to run junior sections. However, Gore has secured an agreement with the Zimbabwe FA that all youth squads can include up to five players from the Zimbabwean diaspora. And to reconnect UK players with their African counterparts, his plans include a tour to Zimbabwe in 2017.

"It will be good for the young boys to go home," explains Gore. "Some have never been home. We feel it's our duty and responsibility to take them home and educate them about our country and values rather than just taking them home to play. It's very much a cultural initiative."

> "Some of our players could easily play in the Premier League back in Zimbabwe"
> TZUK's senior team manager, Kelvin Mushambe

Gore is also working with CAPS United to provide a digital presence, which he hopes to extend to other clubs in the PSL.

The 2017 CECAFA Cup in neighbouring South Africa will save the national team the expense of a long trip across Africa, and the tournament is seen as a potential route onto the national stage for promising young players from the TZUK initiative. WS

Winners...TZUK at the African Nations Cup UK 2016

➤ loss to fourth-tier Astoria Walldorf.

Tuesday December 6

ENGLAND: Sammy Lee, who was only appointed in July, steps down as England assistant manager.
TURKEY: Needing to win at Dynamo Kiev to reach the Champions League knockout stage, Besiktas lose 6-0 and allow Benfica and Napoli to go through instead.

Wednesday December 7

BRAZIL: A 1-1 draw at home to Atletico Mineiro sees Gremio win 4-2 on aggregate and claim the Brazilian Cup for a record fifth time.
ENGLAND: Beaten 5-0 in Portugal by Porto, Leicester City suffer the heaviest-ever defeat by an English side in the Champions League.
GERMANY: Marco Reus' 88th-minute equaliser in a 2-2 draw away to Real Madrid sees Borussia Dortmund set a new record for goals scored in a Champions League group, taking their tally to 21.
ITALY: Neto is in goal for Juventus as they beat Dinamo Zagreb 2-0. His appearance ends Gianluigi Buffon's run of 50 consecutive Champions League games for Juve. Buffon hadn't missed a match since the 0-0 draw with BATE in December 2008.

Thursday December 8

BELGIUM: Gent are set to exit the Europa League until Souleymane Coulibaly's goal in the 94th minute gives them a 1-0 win at Konyaspor and puts them through at the expense of Braga.
CHILE: Nicolas Castillo scores both goals as Universidad Catolica beat Deportes Temuco 2-0 to win the apertura title.
JAPAN: Kashima Antlers kick off the Club World Cup with a 2-1 victory over Auckland City in the first-ever game in a FIFA competition to use video assistance to support referees with "match changing" decisions.

Friday December 9

FRANCE: Police detain Antoine Conte, a 22-year-old defender with Ligue 2 side Reims, after a teenager is attacked with a baseball bat in the city and suffers a brain haemorrhage.
UGANDA: Former international Godfrey Kateregga and team-mate Saddat Kyambadde are sacked by Police FC for match-fixing.

Saturday December 10

GERMANY: Bayern Munich go top of the Bundesliga with a 5-0 win against Wolfsburg, leapfrogging RB Leipzig who lose 1-0 at Ingolstadt.
SPAIN: Real Madrid come from ➤

Japan

MIKE PLASTOW

Away goals seal title for Kashima

Antlers crowned champions

Kashima Antlers won their eighth J.League championship with a victory over Urawa Reds on away goals in the play-off Final. It was an extraordinary comeback for Kashima, who had won the First Stage of the tournament but wound up third, 15 points behind Urawa, in the overall table. However, play-off wins away to overall runners-up Kawasaki Frontale and then Urawa earned Kashima a first league crown since their three back-to-back titles from 2007 to 2009.

"I started this season with the duty to deliver a title and am delighted to have accomplished it," said Masatada Ishii, the former defender who played for Kashima in their first-ever J.League game, in 1993, and has been with the club as a player or coach for almost all of their 18 league and cup titles. Even so, this one was special as it was Kashima's first championship under a Japanese boss. "It means a lot for the club," added Ishii. "And for all Japanese coaches."

In the Final, Urawa won the first leg 1-0 away in Kashima and therefore started the return with a clear advantage in front of a sell-out 59,837 home crowd at Saitama Stadium. And they started confidently, with a seventh-minute goal from former Kashima striker Shinzo Koroki. However, Mu Kanazaki, who scored the only goal in Kashima's semi-final against Kawasaki, struck again with goals either side of half-time, the second a penalty, to secure the championship on away goals.

It was a topsy-turvy season for both Ishii and Kanazaki, with the pair having a spectacular fallout in August after the coach substituted the temperamental striker in a league game. Kanazaki was dropped by both club and country, and Ishii nearly resigned. But by the end of the campaign the pair were full of praise for each other.

"Kanazaki is almost back to 100 per cent and a vital member of the team," offered Ishii; to which Kanazaki replied: "I'm glad I was able to do my job well at the

Victors... Kashima celebrate

> "It means a lot for the club – and all Japanese coaches"
> Masatada Ishii, on becoming the first local coach to win the title with Kashima Antlers

CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND-UP: CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA

Guangzhou Evergrande clinched a record sixth straight Chinese Super League title, finishing seven points clear of the chasing pack.

The title was the second in a row for Brazilian coach Luiz Felipe Scolari since he replaced Fabio Cannavaro, and he celebrated with a one-year contract extension.

Jiangsu, who had high hopes after twice breaking their transfer record to sign Ramires and Alex Teixeira, finished runners-up after dispensing with Romanian coach Dan Petrescu and hiring Korean Choi Yong-soo.

Shanghai SIPG were third despite the record €56m signing of Brazil international Hulk and they replaced coach Sven Goran Eirksson with Andre Villas-Boas at the season's end.

Shijiazhuang Ever Bright and Hangzhou Greentown were relegated.

In a dramatic finish to the K League season, Seoul pipped Asian club champions Jeonbuk Motors to the title.

Jeonbuk and Seoul were level on 67 points as they met on the last day of the season, with the club from the capital winning 1-0 with a goal from ex-Arsenal striker Park Chu-young

Jeonbuk led the table for most of the season until they were handed a nine-point deduction after a club official was found guilty of bribing referees in 2013.

Seoul and Jeonbuk qualify for next year's Champions League group stage, with third-placed Jeju United going into the play-offs, along with Cup-winners Suwon Bluewings.

Suwon were relegated, along with play-off losers Seongnam.

Danger...Urawa's Tomoya Ugajin goes past Yasushi Endo of Kashima

finish and that might have been thanks to Mr Ishii."

Kashima only led the overall table for two rounds of games, in June, when a run of six straight wins put them a point in front of Frontale to take the first stage.

Perhaps it was the loss of Caio to Al Ain, but Kashima's form plummeted from the summer and they fell to 11th, with just six wins, in the second stage, ending the phase with four straight defeats.

But that was still good enough to secure Antlers third place in the overall table, one point ahead of Gamba Osaka, and so ensure that three teams made it to the play-offs, rather than five: the top three plus the two stage winners.

Urawa finished third in the first stage after a run of three straight defeats in June, but roared back to take the second stage, ending up two points ahead of Kawasaki, who were second in the first stage, third in the second, and second overall.

Urawa did at least have the consolation of winning the J.League Cup on penalties against Gamba Osaka. Amazingly for such a big club, it was Urawa's first domestic silverware since winning the league in 2006.

Defending champions Sanfrecce Hiroshima had to wait four games for their first victory of the season and never quite put together a title challenge this time. Gamba also struggled for form, especially after striker Takashi Usami left for Bundesliga side Augsburg in the summer, but they recovered to finish fourth overall.

There were promising performances from Omiya Ardija, who played with great consistency to finish fifth overall on their return to the top flight, and Kashiwa Reysol, who were eighth overall with a team made up of mostly youth products who should continue to improve in 2017. Vissel Kobe, under former Kashiwa boss Nelsinho, were the surprise package, taking second spot in the second stage.

Avispa Fukuoka and Shonan Bellmare were relegated early on and Nagoya Grampus joined them on goal difference on the last day of the season. Nagoya's demotion leaves only Kashima and Yokohama F. Marinos as original members of the J.League who have never gone down. Consadole Sapporo, Shimizu S-Pulse and Cerezo Osaka were promoted from the second tier.

There will be no championship play-off in 2017 as the competition reverts to a single, season-long league format. WS

BEST OF 2016

COACH OF THE SEASON
MASATADA ISHII *(Kashima Antlers)*

Took over from Toninho Cerezo in the summer of 2015 and led Kashima to the League Cup in his first half-season in charge. He followed that up with the First Stage in June and now the championship as well.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
SHUSAKU NISHIKAWA *(Urawa Reds)*

The national team's number one goalkeeper was ever present for Urawa, conceding just 28 goals in 34 league games. Named in the J. League's Best XI every year since 2012, his saves and commanding presence have become a huge factor for both club and country.

Number one... Shusaku Nishikawa

BEST YOUNG PLAYER
YOSUKE IDEGUCHI *(Gamba Osaka)*

The 20-year-old midfielder has had a memorable season, winning both the New Hero Award in the League Cup, the J.League's Best Young Player Award and getting his first call-up for the national side in November. He also got married and had his first child, a daughter, in 2016.

2-1 down to beat Deportivo La Coruna 3-2 and set a new club record of 35 games without defeat.
TURKEY: A twin bomb attack outside Besiktas' stadium in Istanbul, two hours after their 2-1 victory over Bursaspor, kills at least 38 people.
USA: Seattle Sounders win their first-ever MLS Cup title, beating Toronto on penalties after a 0-0 draw at BMO Field in Canada.

Sunday December 11

ARGENTINA: Carlos Tevez scores twice in the *Superclasico* as Boca Juniors win 4-2 at River Plate.
BRAZIL: Internacional draw 1-1 with Fluminense and are relegated to Serie B for the first time since their formation in 1909.
FRANCE: Edinson Cavani scores twice as Paris Saint-Germain come from two goals down to draw 2-2 at home to Nice.
HOLLAND: Mateusz Klich's injury-time penalty gives Twente a 1-0 win against Ajax and prevents the visitors from going the whole of 2016 without losing away in the Eredivisie.
HONDURAS: Motagua win the home leg of the apertura Final, beating Platense 1-0.
ITALY: Juventus recover from being behind to win 3-1 at Torino in the Turin derby. Marek Hamsik moves up to third in Napoli's all-time scoring list with his 105th goal as they beat Cagliari 5-0.
PORTUGAL: Benfica maintain their four-point lead at the top of the table with a 2-1 victory at home to Lisbon rivals Sporting, who fall to third as Porto beat Feirense 4-0.

Down...Internacional's Anderson (right)

SPAIN: Espanyol win 2-1 at home to Sporting Gijon, but Duje Cop's injury-time consolation goal ends home goalkeeper Diego Lopez's club record run of 586 minutes without conceding in La Liga.

Monday December 12

BALLON D'OR: Cristiano Ronaldo wins the trophy for a fourth time, collecting 745 votes, ahead of Lionel Messi (316) and Antoine Griezmann (198).
BRAZIL: Chapecoense goalkeeper Danilo, who was among the 71 who died in his side's plane crash, is named Fans' Best Player in the Brazilian league.
FINLAND: After failing to win any of his 11 games in charge of the national team, Hans Backe is replaced as coach of Finland by Markku Kanerva.
UKRAINE: Table-toppers Shakhtar Donetsk maintain this season's unbeaten league record with a 4-3

CONCACAF

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER

Ticos on track for Russia 2018

Costa Rica top the Hex qualifying group

Shock... Cristian Bolanos celebrates his goal against the USA

Throughout history, there have been teams that come from nowhere to enjoy a great tournament and then disappear just as quickly as they appeared. The Greece team that won Euro 2004 is a perfect example, but it also happened with Senegal and Turkey in 2002, and Bulgaria in 1994.

And after the World Cup in Brazil, Costa Rica looked set to be the next "one-tournament wonder".

Having failed to even reach South Africa 2010, the Ticos had spent 24 years without advancing to the second stage of a World Cup finals before their march to the last eight in 2014.

Yet after the first two rounds of the final CONCACAF qualifiers in November, it looks as if the region may have a new power – and one which is here to stay.

With European-based Keylor Navas, Bryan Ruiz, Celso Borges and Joel Campbell still in their ranks, Costa Rica and could not have had a better start on the road to Russia. They began their qualifying campaign in the six-team "Hexagonal" in Port-of-Spain – a venue that often proves difficult for Central American teams against a fast and powerful Trinidad & Tobago who had been one of the surprises of the last Gold Cup. But goals from Cristian Bolanos and Ronald Matarrita saw the visitors secure a 2-0 victory.

Four days later, Oscar Ramirez's side entertained the USA in San Jose and offered the *Ticos* a chance to atone for the worst result that this generation have experienced: June's 4-0 loss to the US in the Copa America Centenario. And what a revenge they took.

With the visitors reeling from a 2-1 home defeat by Mexico in their opener, the hosts took advantage of numerous defensive errors to win 4-0 themselves.

A goal from Johan Venegas just before the interval opened the door to a second half in which there was only one team ever going to win. Bolanos and Campbell (two) added further goals as the hosts took top spot with six points out six.

> It looks as if the region may have a new power – and one which is here to stay

Mexico, who had previously lost all four games against the USA in Columbus' Mapfre Stadium, followed up their victory in Ohio with a 0-0 in Panama, who are looking to reach the World Cup finals for the first time. The pair now have four points, after Panama's shock 1-0 win in Honduras in the opening round of games.

The Hex will resume on March 24, with Costa Rica travelling to Mexico's Azteca Stadium being the main attraction. In the other two duels, the US host Honduras and Panama will go to Trinidad & Tobago.

Those games are followed four days later by Honduras v Costa Rica, Panama v USA and Trinidad & Tobago v Mexico. WS

Close...Costa Rica's Kendall Watson (in white) gets in a header against Trinidad & Tobago

win at second-place Dynamo Kiev.

Tuesday December 13

ENGLAND: Arsenal lose in the league for the first time since their opening game of the season, going down 2-1 at Everton.
INDONESIA: Rizky Pora and Hansamu Pranata are on target for the hosts as Indonesia come from behind to beat Thailand 2-1 in the first leg of the 2016 AFF Championship Final.

Wednesday December 14

ARGENTINA: Former international Juan Sebastian Veron, who is now 41 and president of Estudiantes, trains with the first-team squad and looks set to make good on a promise to come out of retirement for the 2017 Libertadores Cup if supporters bought 65 per cent of the boxes at the club's new stadium.
CHILE: Colo Colo beat Everton 4-0 in the Chilean Cup Final.
ENGLAND: West Brom's Salomon Rondon becomes only the second player to score a hat-trick of headed goals in the Premier League – after Duncan Ferguson for Everton against Bolton Wanderers in 1997 – with all three of his side's goals in a 3-1 victory over Swansea City.

Hat-trick...Salomon Rondon

GERMANY: Youth coach Manuel Baum is put in charge of Augsburg until the winter break after the club parts company with Dirk Schuster.
JAPAN: Kashima Antlers become the first Japanese club to reach the Club World Cup Final, beating Atletico Nacional 3-0.

Thursday December 15

ARGENTINA: Lucas Alario scores a hat-trick as River Plate beat Rosario Central 4-3 to win the Argentinian Cup and claim their place in the 2017 Libertadores Cup.
HOLLAND: Ajax lose 2-1 to second-tier Cambuur in the Dutch Cup.
ITALY: Genoa beat Fiorentina 1-0 in a match that finishes three months after it started. The game originally took place on September 11 but was abandoned after 28 minutes due to a hailstorm.
SCOTLAND: Malky Mackay, who in 2014 was investigated over texts containing discriminatory language, is appointed performance director by the Scottish Football Association.
SPAIN: Cristiano Ronaldo scores his 500th career club goal as Real Madrid beat Club America 2-0 in the Club World Cup semi-finals. Luis Suarez agrees a new contract with Barcelona that includes a €200m buy-out clause. WS

	FORMAT		CHAMPIONS
Chile PRIMERA DIVISION	The 16-team apertura and clausura championships follow the European calender, with teams playing each other once in each. There is no deciding play-off for the winners.		Having won the 2015-16 clausura, Universidad Catolica claimed consecutive titles for the first time with the 2016-17 apertura. The key moment was their penultimate game, when they won 6-2 away to joint leaders Deportes Iquique.
Colombia PRIMERA A	Two separate tournaments, apertura and Finalizacion, played over the calendar year. Each consists of 20 teams playing each other once, with the top eight qualifying for a two-leg knockout tournament.		A 1-0 aggregate win over Deportes Tolima gave Santa Fe (below) victory in the Torneo Finalizacion Final and a ninth title. Coach Gustavo Costas has now won the league in four different countries.
Ecuador SERIE A	Played over the calendar year, the championship is split into two stages, each with 12 teams, in home and away league format. The two stage winners meet in the Final.		There was no need for a Grand Final because, tight in defence and expansive in attack, Barcelona cruised to victory in both stages to claim their 15th overall title. Their only challengers were Guayaquil rivals Emelec.
Paraguay PRIMERA DIVISION	Two separate championships, apertura and clausura, are played over the calendar year. Both have 12 teams in a home-and-away format. There is no overall champion.		With a round to spare, Guarani (below) sealed the clausura title ahead of Olimpia. It was an 11th Primera championship, and the first for six years, for the small club from Asuncion.
Peru TORNEO DESCENTRALIZADO	A convoluted format involves 16 teams in 3 separate stages, the first two pure leagues, the third dividing them into two groups. The top four – stage winners plus those with most points accumulated – go onto a semi-finals play-off.		Just as last year, the Final was between Sporting Cristal of Lima and Melgar of Arequipa. Cristal won their 17th title on away goals, holding on for a goalless draw in front of their own fans after the first leg ended 1-1.
Uruguay PRIMERA DIVISION	With Uruguay switching from a European season to a calendar year, the gap was bridged with a Transition tournament, in which 16 teams met each other once on a league basis.		In a problematic season dominated by fan violence, especially involving the under-performing Penarol, Nacional (below) claimed a 46th title after an uneasy start to win by a five-point margin.
Venezuela PRIMERA DIVISION	The apertura and clausura, are held over the calendar year. Twenty teams meet on a league basis, with the top eight going through to the quarter-finals. The apertura and clausura winners meet in a two-leg Final to determine the overall champion.		Apertura champs Zamora (right) won the overall title, beating clausura winners Zulia 4-2 on aggregate, with 2-1 victories both home and away.

CONTINENTAL QUALIFIERS	PLAYER OF THE SEASON	COACH OF THE SEASON	NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Universidad Catolica, Dep Iquique, Colo Colo and Union Espanola will be playing in the Libertadores, while O'Higgins, Palestino (right), Universidad de Chile and Everton are in the Sudamericana.	Centre-forward Nico Castillo led the line well for Universidad Catolica and finished the season in a blaze of goals, also topping the assists table. However, his partnership with Diego Buonanotte is set to end as the playmaker is heading to Mexico.	It was a memorable year for 49-year-old ex-midfielder Mario Salas (right), whose free-scoring Universidad Catolica won both league titles and the Super Cup.	It was a breakthrough year for 22-year-old Universidad Catolica centre-back Guillermo Maripan. Strong and imposing, he was called up to the national team squad for January's 2017 China Cup.
Libertadores: Atletico Nacional (as holders), Independiente Medellin, Santa Fe, Millonarios and Junior. Sudamericana: Deportes Tolima, Deportivo Cali, Patriotas and Rionegro Aguilas.	Sante Fe's Anderson Plata (right) is a pacy figure who operates off the central striker, finding space between the lines to score goals and create goals.	Reinaldo Rueda (right) came unstuck in the Club World Cup semi-final but otherwise had a fine campaign with Atletico Nacional, despite the repeated need to rebuild his side after key players were sold.	Given first-team chances because of Atletico Nacional's fixture pile-up, 17-year-old centre-back Carlos Cuesta looks a wonderful prospect.
Barcelona go into the Libertadores, with the next three with the most points over both stages: Emelec, El Nacional and Independiente del Valle. LDU Quito, Deportivo Cuenca, Universidad Catolica and Fuerza Amarilla enter the Sudamericana.	Argentinian-born midfielder Matias Oyola, who is now a naturalised Ecuadorian, linked Barcelona well with his positional sense and his left-footed passing.	Guillermo Almada (right) took charge of Barcelona after a successful four-year spell in charge of River Plate in his Uruguayan homeland and made a complete success of his first opportunity coaching a big club.	Vapable of operating up top or off a centre-forward, El Nacional's 20-year-old Michael Estrada enjoyed a splendid first season with a major club, having given hints of his talent with little Macara in 2015.
Guarani join apertura winners Libertad Olimpia and Deportivo Capiata in the Libertadores. Cerro Porteno, Sol de America, Sportivo Luqueno and Nacional go into the Sudamericana Cup.	Always a danger, usually cutting in from the left, Cecilio Dominguez (right) was the spark behind Cerro Porteno's run to the semi-finals of the Sudamericana.	Daniel Garnero who won his first major coaching title in difficult circumstances, the Argentinian taking over in early August after Francisco Arce suddenly quit to take charge of Paraguay's national team.	Cerro Porteno's Josue Colman (below) is a versatile attacking midfielder who greatly impressed in the last few months of the season.
Sporting Cristal and Melgar enter the Libertadores, along with the other semi-finalists Universitario and Deportivo Municipal. Alianza Lima, Comerciantes Unidos, Sport Huancayo and Juan Aurich go into the Sudamericana.	Mobile, willing and versatile, Argentinian striker Bernardo Cuesta (right) led the line well for Melgar and has now joined Junior in Colombia.	No team from the provinces has ever won two consecutive titles, and no one has come closer than Melgar, who were led by charismatic former national-team captain Juan Reynoso (above).	Pedro Aquino of Sporting Cristal is a combative central midfielder with plenty of quality as well. On the bench a year ago, but indispensable now, he has also found a place in the national team.
Libertadores: Penarol, Nacional, Wanderers (right) and Cerro. Sudamericana: Danubio, Defensor, Liverpool and Boston River.	Nacionals' Kevin Ramirez (right) is a quick, left-sided striker who tipped the balance at important times during the season.	A coach with a long history in charge of little teams, Gaston Machado (right) came close to taking Wanderers to their first national title since 1931.	Tall, imposing centre forward Joaquin Ardaiz of Danubio looks a real find. Strong enough to link the play back to goal, he is sufficiently mobile to lead the charge and is still only 17.
In the Libertadores, Zamora and Zulia are joined by Carabobo and Deportivo Tachira. Cup runners-up Estudiantes Caracas, clausura semi-finalists Atletico Venezuela, along with Caracas and Anzoategui, will enter the Sudamerica.	Captain of the champions Zamora, midfielder Luis Vargas (right) balanced out a free-scoring side and was also an efficient taker of free-kicks.	Zulia were only founded in 2005, but Cesar Marcano took them to triumph in the cup and came close to completing the double with the league title.	Atletico Venezuela's teenage central midfielder Yangel Herrera showed such promising dynamism that he was fast-tracked into the national squad and made his debut in the World Cup qualifiers. ***All reviews by Tim Vickery***

Club football

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Sep13
Basle (Swi) 1 (Steffen 80)
Ludogorets (Bul) 1 (Jonathan Cafu 45)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 30,852. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Bls)

Sep13
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 1 (Cavani 1)
Arsenal (Eng) 1 (Sanchez 78)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 46,440. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Sent off: Verratti (PSG) 90+3; Giroud (Arsenal) 90+3

Sep 28
Arsenal 2 (Walcott 7, 26)
Basle 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 59,993. **Ref:** Makkelie (Hol)

Sep 28
Ludogorets 1 (Natanael 16)
Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Matuidi 41, Cavani 56, 60)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 17,155. **Ref:** Kralovec (CzR)

Oct19
Arsenal 6 (Sanchez 13, Walcott 42, Oxlade-Chamberlain 47, Ozil 56, 83, 87)
Ludogorets 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 59,944. **Ref:** Dias (Por)

Oct19
Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Di Maria 40, Lucas Moura 62, Cavani pen 90+3)
Basle 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 46,488. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)

Nov1
Basle 1 (Zuffi 76)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Matuidi 43, Meunier 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 34,639. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)
Sent off: Serey Die (Basle) 84

Nov1
Ludogorets 2 (Jonathan Cafu 12, Keseru 15)
Arsenal 3 (Xhaka 20, Giroud 42, Ozil 88)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 30,862. **Ref:** Nijhuis (Hol)

Nov 23
Arsenal 2 (Giroud pen 45+1, Verratti og 60)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Cavani 18, Iwobi og 77)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 59,628. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

Nov 23
Ludogorets 0
Basle 0
Att: 20,821. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)

Dec 6
Basle 1 (Doumbia 78)
Arsenal 4 (Lucas Perez 8, 16, 47, Iwobi 53)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 36,000. **Ref:** Sousa (Por)

Dec 6
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Cavani 61, Di Maria 90+2)
Ludogorets 2 (Misidjan 15, Wanderson 69)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 42,650. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal (Q)	6	4	2	0	18	6	14
PSG (Q)	6	3	3	0	13	7	12
Ludogorets (EL)	6	0	3	3	6	15	3
Basle	6	0	2	4	3	12	2

Group B

Sep13
Benfica (Por) 1 (Cervi 12)
Besiktas (Tur) 1 (Talisca 90+3)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 42,126. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)

Sep13
Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 1 (Harmash 26)
Napoli (Ita) 2 (Milik 36, 45+2)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 35,137. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Sent off: Sydorchuk (Dynamo Kiev) 68

Sep 28
Besiktas 1 (Quaresma 29)
Dynamo Kiev 1 (Tsyhankov 65)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 33,938. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)

Sep 28
Napoli 4 (Hamsik 20, Mertens 51, 58, Milik pen 54)
Benfica 2 (Goncalo Guedes 70, Salvio 86)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 41,281. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

Oct19
Dynamo Kiev 0
Benfica 2 (Salvio pen 9, Cervi 55)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 25,991. **Ref:** Fernandez Borbalan (Spa)

Oct19
Napoli 2 (Mertens 30, Gabbiadini pen 69)
Besiktas 3 (Adriano 12, Aboubakar 38, 86)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 28,502. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)

Nov1
Benfica 1 (Salvio pen 45+2)
Dynamo Kiev 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 51,641. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

Nov1
Besiktas 1 (Quaresma pen 79)
Napoli 1 (Hamsik 82)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,552. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)

Nov 23
Besiktas 3 (Tosun 58, Quaresma pen 83, Aboubakar 89)
Benfica 3 (Goncalo Guedes 10, Nelson Semedo 25, Fejsa 31)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 36,063. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Nov 23
Napoli 0
Dynamo Kiev 0
Att: 33,736. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)

Dec 6
Benfica 1 (Jimenez 87)
Napoli 2 (Callejon 60, Mertens 79)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 55,634. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)

Dec 6
Dynamo Kiev 6 (Besedin 9, Yarmolenko pen 30, Buyalskyi 32, Gonzalez 45+3, Sydorchuk 60, Junior Moraes 77)
Besiktas 0
HT: 4-0. **Att:** 14,036. **Ref:** Thomson (Sco)
Sent off: Beck 29, Aboubakar 56 (both Besiktas)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Napoli (Q)	6	3	2	1	11	8	11
Benfica (Q)	6	2	2	2	10	10	8
Besiktas (EL)	6	1	4	1	9	14	7
Dynamo Kiev	6	1	2	3	8	6	5

Group C

Sep13
Barcelona (Spa) 7 (Messi 3, 27, 60, Neymar 50, Iniesta 59, Suarez 75, 88)
Celtic (Sco) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 73,290. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)

Sep14
Manchester City (Eng) 4 (Aguero 9, pen 28, 77, Iheanacho 90+1)
Monchengladbach (Ger) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 30,270. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)

Sep 28
Celtic 3 (Dembele 3, 47, Sterling og 20)
Manchester City 3 (Fernandinho 12, Sterling 28, Nolito 55)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 57,592. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)

Sep 28
Monchengladbach 1 (Hazard 34)
Barcelona 2 (Arda 65, Pique 74)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 46,283. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Oct19
Barcelona 4 (Messi 17, 61, 69, Neymar 89)
Manchester City 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 96,290. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)
Sent off: Bravo (Manchester City) 53; Mathieu (Barcelona) 73

Oct19
Celtic 0
Monchengladbach 2 (Stindl 57, Hahn 77)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 57,814. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)

Nov1
Manchester City 3 (Gundogan 39, 74, De Bruyne 51)
Barcelona 1 (Messi 21)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 53,340. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)

Nov1
Monchengladbach 1 (Stindl 32)
Celtic 1 (Dembele pen 76)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 46,283. **Ref:** Sousa (Por)
Sent off: Korb (Monchengladbach) 75

Nov 23
Celtic 0
Barcelona 2 (Messi 24, pen 56)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 57,937. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)

Nov 23
Monchengladbach 1 (Raffael 23)
Manchester City 1 (Silva 45+1)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 45,921. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Sent off: Stindl (Monchengladbach) 51; Fernandinho (Manchester City) 63

Dec 6
Barcelona 4 (Messi 16, Arda 50, 53, 67)
Monchengladbach 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 67,157. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)

Dec 6
Manchester City 1 (Iheanacho 8)
Celtic 1 (Roberts 4)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 51,297. **Ref:** Vincic (Sln)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona (Q)	6	5	0	1	20	4	15
Man City (Q)	6	2	3	1	12	10	9
M'gladbach (EL)	6	1	2	3	5	12	5
Celtic	6	0	3	3	5	16	3

Group D

Sep13
Bayern Munich (Ger) 5 (Lewandowski pen 28, Muller 45+2, Kimmich 53, 60, Bernat 90)
Rostov (Rus) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)

Sep13
PSV Eindhoven (Hol) 0
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 1 (Saul 43)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 33,989. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)

Sep 28
Atletico Madrid 1 (Carrasco 35)
Bayern Munich 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 48,242. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)

Sep 28
Rostov 2 (Poloz 8, 37)
PSV Eindhoven 2 (Propper 14, L De Jong 45+2)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 12,646. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

Oct19
Bayern Munich 4 (Muller 13, Kimmich 21, Lewandowski 59, Robben 84)
PSV Eindhoven 1 (Narsingh 41)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)

Oct19
Rostov 0
Atletico Madrid 1 (Carrasco 62)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,400. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)

Nov1
Atletico Madrid 2 (Griezmann 28, 90+3)
Rostov 1 (Azmoun 30)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 40,392. **Ref:** Thomson (Sco)

Nov1
PSV Eindhoven 1 (Arias 14)
Bayern Munich 2 (Lewandowski pen 34, 74)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)

Nov 23
Atletico Madrid 2 (Gameiro 55, Griezmann 66)
PSV Eindhoven 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 37,891. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Bls)

Nov 23
Rostov 3 (Azmoun 44, Poloz pen 50, Noboa 67)
Bayern Munich 2 (Douglas Costa 35, Bernat 52)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 15,211. **Ref:** Dias (Por)

Dec 6
Bayern Munich 1 (Lewandowski 28)
Atletico Madrid 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

Dec 6
PSV Eindhoven 0
Rostov 0
Att: 33,400. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atl Madrid (Q)	6	5	0	1	7	2	15
Bayern (Q)	6	4	0	2	14	6	12
Rostov (EL)	6	1	2	3	6	12	5
PSV	6	0	2	4	4	11	2

Group E

Sep14
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 2 (Mehmedi 9, Calhanoglu 15)
CSKA Moscow (Rus) 2 (Dzagoev 36, Eremenko 38)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 23,459. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)

Sep14
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 1 (Alderweireld 45)
Monaco (Fra) 2 (Bernardo Silva 15, Lemar 31)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 85,011. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)

Sep 27
CSKA Moscow 0
Tottenham Hotspur 1 (Son 71)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 26,153. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)

Sep 27
Monaco 1 (Glik 90+4)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Hernandez 74)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 8,100. **Ref:** Fernandez Borbalan (Spa)

Oct18
Bayer Leverkusen 0
Tottenham Hotspur 0
Att: 28,887. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)

Oct18
CSKA Moscow 1 (Traore 34)
Monaco 1 (Bernardo Silva 87)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 24,125. **Ref:** Strombergsson (Swe)

Nov 2
Monaco 3 (Germain 13, Falcao 29, 41)
CSKA Moscow 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 10,029. **Ref:** Jug (Sln)

Nov 2
Tottenham Hotspur 0
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Kampl 65)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 85,512. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)

Nov 22
CSKA Moscow 1 (Natcho pen 76)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Volland 16)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 19,164. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)

Nov 22
Monaco 2 (Sidibe 48, Lemar 53)
Tottenham Hotspur 1 (Kane pen 52)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 13,100. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)

Dec 7
Bayer Leverkusen 3 (Yurchenko 30, Brandt 48, De Sanctis og 82)
Monaco 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 21,928. **Ref:** Mazeika (Lit)

Dec 7
Tottenham Hotspur 3 (Alli 38, Kane 45+1, Akinfeev og 77)
CSKA Moscow 1 (Dzagoev 33)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 62,034. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monaco (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	7	11
Leverkusen (Q)	6	2	4	0	8	4	10
Tottenham (EL)	6	2	1	3	6	6	7
CSKA Moscow	6	0	3	3	5	11	3

Group F

Sep14
Legia Warsaw (Pol) 0
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 6 (Gotze 7, Papastathopoulos 15, Bartra 17, Raphael Guerreiro 51, Castro 76, Aubameyang 87)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 27,304. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)

Sep14
Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Cristiano Ronaldo 89, Morata 90+4)
Sporting Lisbon (Por) 1 (Bruno Cesar 48)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 72,179. **Ref:** Tagliavento (Ita)

Sep 27
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Aubameyang 43, Schurrle 87)
Real Madrid 2 (Cristiano Ronaldo 17, Varane 68)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 65,849. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)

Sep 27
Sporting Lisbon 2 (Ruiz 28, Dost 37)
Legia Warsaw 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 40,094. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

Oct18
Real Madrid 5 (Bale 16, Jodlowiec og 20, Marco Asensio 37, Lucas Vazquez 68, Morata 84)
Legia Warsaw 1 (Radovic pen 22)
HT: 3-1. **Att:** 70,251. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)

Oct18
Sporting Lisbon 1 (Bruno Cesar 67)
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Aubameyang 9, Weigl 43)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 46,609. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Nov 2
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Ramos 12)
Sporting Lisbon 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 65,849. **Ref:** Makkelie (Hol)

Nov 2
Legia Warsaw 3 (Odjidja 40, Radovic 58, Moulin 83)
Real Madrid 3 (Bale 1, Benzema 35, Kovacic 85)
HT: 1-2. *Played behind closed doors.*
Ref: Kralovec (CzR)

Nov 22
Borussia Dortmund 8 (Kagawa 17, 18, Sahin 20, Dembele 29, Reus 32, 52, Passlack 81, Rzezniczak og 90+2)
Legia Warsaw 4 (Prijovic 10, 24, Kucharczyk 57, Nikolic 83)
HT: 5-2. **Att:** 55,094. **Ref:** Strombergsson (Swe)

Nov 22
Sporting Lisbon 1 (Adrien Silva pen 80)
Real Madrid 2 (Varane 29, Benzema 87)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 50,046. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Sent off: Joao Pereira (Sporting Lisbon) 64

Dec 7
Legia Warsaw 1 (Guilherme 30)
Sporting Lisbon 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 28,232. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Sent off: William Carvalho (Sporting Lisbon) 85

Dec 7
Real Madrid 2 (Benzema 28, 53)
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Aubameyang 60, Reus 88)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 76,894. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dortmund (Q)	6	4	2	0	21	9	14
Real Madrid (Q)	6	3	3	0	16	10	12
Legia (EL)	6	1	1	4	9	24	4
Sporting Lisbon	6	1	0	5	5	8	3

Group G

Sep14
Club Brugge (Blg) 0
Leicester City (Eng) 3 (Albrighton 5, Mahrez 29, pen 61)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 20,970. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)

Sep14
Porto (Por) 1 (Otavio 13)
Copenhagen (Den) 1 (Cornelius 52)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 34,325. **Ref:** Jug (Sln)
Sent off: Gregus (Copenhagen) 66

Sep 27
Copenhagen 4 (Denswil og 53, Delaney 64, Santander 69, Jorgensen 90+2)
Club Brugge 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 25,605. **Ref:** Thomson (Sco)

Sep 27
Leicester City 1 (Slimani 25)
Porto 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 31,805. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)

Oct18
Club Brugge 1 (Vossen 12)
Porto 2 (Layun 68, Andre Silva pen 90+2)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 23,325. **Ref:** Tagliavento (Ita)

Oct18
Leicester City 1 (Mahrez 40)
Copenhagen 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 31,037. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)

Nov 2
Copenhagen 0
Leicester City 0
Att: 34,146. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

Nov 2
Porto 1 (Andre Silva 37)
Club Brugge 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 32,310. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)

Nov 22
Copenhagen 0
Porto 0
Att: 32,036. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)

Nov 22
Leicester City 2 (Okazaki 5, Mahrez pen 30)
Club Brugge 1 (Izquierdo 52)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 31,443. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)

Dec 7
Club Brugge 0
Copenhagen 2 (Mechele og 8, Jorgensen 15)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 18,981. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

Dec 7
Porto 5 (Andre Silva 6, pen 64, Corona 26, Brahimi 44, Diogo Jota 77)
Leicester City 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 39,310. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leicester (Q)	6	4	1	1	7	6	13
Porto (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	3	11
Cop'hagen (EL)	6	2	3	1	7	2	9
Club Brugge	6	0	0	6	2	14	0

Group H

Sep14
Juventus (Ita) 0
Sevilla (Spa) 0
Att: 33,261. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)

Sep14
Lyon (Fra) 3 (Tolisso 13, Ferri 49, Cornet 57)
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 43,754. **Ref:** Strombergsson (Swe)

Sep 27
Dinamo Zagreb 0
Juventus 4 (Pjanic 24, Higuain 31, Dybala 57, Daniel Alves 85)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 23,875. **Ref:** Sousa (Por)

Sep 27
Sevilla 1 (Ben Yedder 53)
Lyon 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 36,741. **Ref:** Nijhuis (Hol)

Oct18
Dinamo Zagreb 0
Sevilla 1 (Nasri 37)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 6,021. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

Oct18
Lyon 0
Juventus 1 (Cuadrado 76)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 53,907. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Sent off: Lemina (Juventus) 54

Nov 2
Juventus 1 (Higuain pen 13)
Lyon 1 (Tolisso 85)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 40,356. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)

Nov 2
Sevilla 4 (Vietto 31, Escudero 66, N'Zonzi 80, Ben Yedder 87)
Dinamo Zagreb 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 35,215. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)
Sent off: Stojanovic (Sevilla) 45+1

Nov 22
Dinamo Zagreb 0
Lyon 1 (Lacazette 72)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 7,834. **Ref:** Kralovec (CzR)

Nov 22
Sevilla 1 (Pareja 9)
Juventus 3 (Marchisio pen 45+2, Bonucci 84, Mandzukic 90+4)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 38,942. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)
Sent off: Vazquez (Sevilla) 36

Dec 7
Juventus 2 (Higuain 52, Rugani 73)
Dinamo Zagreb 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 39,380. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)

Dec 7
Lyon 0
Sevilla 0
Att: 52,423. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus (Q)	6	4	2	0	11	2	14
Sevilla (Q)	6	3	2	1	7	3	11
Lyon (EL)	6	2	2	2	5	3	8
Dinamo Z	6	0	0	6	0	15	0

● *The top 2 in each group have qualified for the 1st knockout round (last16); the 3rd-placed teams enter the Europa League at the1st knockout round (last 32) stage*

Group stage top scorers

10	Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
6	Edinson Cavani (Paris Saint-Germain)
5	Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich)
4	Andre Silva (Porto)
	Arda Turan (Barcelona)
	Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (Dortmund)
	Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)
	Riyad Mahrez (Leicester City)
	Dries Mertens (Napoli)
	Mesut Ozil (Arsenal)

1st knockout round (last 16) draw

Bayer Leverkusen v Atletico Madrid
(Feb 21 & Mar 15)
Bayern Munich v Arsenal
(Feb 15 & Mar 7)
Benfica v Borussia Dortmund
(Feb 14 & Mar 8)
Manchester City v Monaco
(Feb 21 & Mar 15)
Paris Saint-Germain v Barcelona
(Feb 14 & Mar 8)
Porto v Juventus
(Feb 22 & Mar 14)
Real Madrid v Napoli
(Feb 15 & Mar 7)
Sevilla v Leicester City
(Feb 22 & Mar 14)

EUROPA LEAGUE

Group A

Sep 15: Feyenoord (Hol) 1 Manchester United (Eng) 0; Zorya (Ukr) 1 Fenerbahce (Tur) 1.
Sep 29: Fenerbahce 1 Feyenoord 0; Manchester United 1 Zorya 0.
Oct 20: Feyenoord 1 Zorya 0; Manchester United 4 Fenerbahce 1.
Nov 3: Fenerbahce 2 Manchester United 1; Zorya 1 Feyenoord 1.
Nov 24: Fenerbahce 2 Zorya 0; Manchester United 4 Feyenoord 0.
Dec 8: Feyenoord 0 Fenerbahce 1; Zorya 0 Manchester United 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce (Q)	6	4	1	1	8	6	13
Man Utd (Q)	6	4	0	2	12	4	12
Feyenoord	6	2	1	3	3	7	7
Zorya	6	0	2	4	2	8	2

Group B

Sep 15: APOEL (Cyp) 2 Astana (Kaz) 1; Young Boys (Swi) 0 Olympiakos (Gre) 1.
Sep 29: Astana 0 Young Boys 0; Olympiakos 0 APOEL 1.
Oct 20: Olympiakos 4 Astana 1; Young Boys 3 APOEL 1.
Nov 3: APOEL 1 Young Boys 0; Astana 1 Olympiakos 1.
Nov 24: Astana 2 APOEL 1; Olympiakos 1 Young Boys 1.
Dec 8: APOEL 2 Olympiakos 0; Young Boys 3 Astana 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
APOEL (Q)	6	4	0	2	8	6	12
Olympiakos (Q)	6	2	2	2	7	6	8
Young Boys	6	2	2	2	7	4	8
Astana	6	1	2	3	5	11	5

Group C

Sep 15: Anderlecht (Blg) 3 Qabala (Aze) 1; Mainz (Ger) 1 Saint-Etienne (Fra) 1.
Sep 29: Qabala 2 Mainz 3; Saint-Etienne 1 Anderlecht 1.
Oct 20: Mainz 1 Anderlecht 1; Saint-Etienne 1 Qabala 0.
Nov 3: Anderlecht 6 Mainz 1; Qabala 1 Saint-Etienne 2.
Nov 24: Qabala 1 Anderlecht 3; Saint-Etienne 0 Mainz 0.
Dec 8: Anderlecht 2 Saint-Etienne 3; Mainz 2 Qabala 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St-Etienne (Q)	6	3	3	0	8	5	12
Anderlecht (Q)	6	3	2	1	16	8	11
Mainz	6	2	3	1	8	10	9
Qabala	6	0	0	6	5	14	0

Group D

Sep 15: AZ Alkmaar (Hol) 1 Dundalk (RoI) 1; Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) 3 Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) 4.
Sep 29: Dundalk 1 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0; Zenit St Petersburg 5 AZ Alkmaar 0.
Oct 20: AZ Alkmaar 1 Maccabi Tel Aviv 2; Dundalk 1 Zenit St Petersburg 2.
Nov 3: Maccabi Tel Aviv 0 AZ Alkmaar 0; Zenit St Petersburg 2 Dundalk 1.
Nov 24: Dundalk 0 AZ Alkmaar 1; Zenit St Petersburg 2 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0.
Dec 8: AZ Alkmaar 3 Zenit St Petersburg 2; Maccabi Tel Aviv 2 Dundalk 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit (Q)	6	5	0	1	17	8	15
AZ (Q)	6	2	2	2	6	10	8
Mac Tel Aviv	6	2	1	3	7	9	7
Dundalk	6	1	1	4	5	8	4

Group E

Sep 15: Astra (Rom) 2 Austria Vienna (Aut) 3; Viktoria Plzen (CzR) 1 Roma (Ita) 1.
Sep 29: Austria Vienna 0 Viktoria Plzen 0; Roma 4 Astra 0.
Oct 20: Roma 3 Austria Vienna 3; Viktoria Plzen 1 Astra 2.
Nov 3: Astra 1 Viktoria Plzen 1; Austria Vienna 2 Roma 4.
Nov 24: Austria Vienna 1 Astra 2; Roma 4 Viktoria Plzen 1.
Dec 8: Astra 0 Roma 0; Viktoria Plzen 3 Austria Vienna 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Roma (Q)	6	3	3	0	16	7	12
Astra (Q)	6	2	2	2	7	10	8
Viktoria Plzen	6	1	3	2	7	10	6
Austria Vienna	6	1	2	3	11	14	5

Group F

Sep 15: Rapid Vienna (Aut) 3 Genk (Blg) 2; Sassuolo (Ita) 3 Athletic Bilbao (Spa) 0.
Sep 29: Athletic Bilbao 1 Rapid Vienna 0; Genk 3 Sassuolo 1.
Oct 20: Genk 2 Athletic Bilbao 0; Rapid Vienna 1 Sassuolo 1.
Nov 3: Athletic Bilbao 5 Genk 3; Sassuolo 2 Rapid Vienna 2.
Nov 24: Athletic Bilbao 3 Sassuolo 2; Genk 1 Rapid Vienna 0.
Dec 8: Rapid Vienna 1 Athletic Bilbao 1.
Dec 9: Sassuolo 0 Genk 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Genk (Q)	6	4	0	2	13	9	12
Ath Bilbao (Q)	6	3	1	2	10	11	10
Rapid Vienna	6	1	3	2	7	8	6
Sassuolo	6	1	2	3	9	11	5

Group G
Sep 15: Panathinaikos (Gre) 1 Ajax (Hol) 2; Standard Liege (Blg) 1 Celta Vigo (Spa) 1.
Sep 29: Ajax 1 Standard Liege 0; Celta Vigo 2 Panathinaikos 0.
Oct 20: Celta Vigo 2 Ajax 2; Standard Liege 2 Panathinaikos 2.
Nov 3: Ajax 3 Celta Vigo 2; Panathinaikos 0 Standard Liege 3.
Nov 24: Ajax 2 Panathinaikos 0; Celta Vigo 1 Standard Liege 1.
Dec 8: Panathinaikos 0 Celta Vigo 2; Standard Liege 1 Ajax 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax (Q)	6	4	2	0	11	6	14
Celta Vigo (Q)	6	2	3	1	10	7	9
Standard	6	1	4	1	8	6	7
Panathinaikos	6	0	1	5	3	13	1

Group H
Sep 15: Konyaspor (Tur) 0 Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 1; Sporting Braga (Por) 1 Gent (Blg) 1.
Sep 29: Gent 2 Konyaspor 0; Shakhtar Donetsk 2 Sporting Braga 0.
Oct 20: Konyaspor 1 Sporting Braga 1; Shakhtar Donetsk 5 Gent 0.
Nov 3: Gent 3 Shakhtar Donetsk 5; Sporting Braga 3 Konyaspor 1.
Nov 24: Gent 2 Sporting Braga 2; Shakhtar Donetsk 4 Konyaspor 0.
Dec 8: Konyaspor 0 Gent 1; Sporting Braga 2 Shakhtar Donetsk 4.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar (Q)	6	6	0	0	21	5	18
Gent (Q)	6	2	2	2	9	13	8
Braga	6	1	3	2	9	11	6
Konyaspor	6	0	1	5	2	12	1

Group I
Sep 15: Nice (Fra) 0 Schalke (Ger) 1; Salzburg (Aut) 0 Krasnodar (Rus) 1.
Sep 29: Krasnodar 5 Nice 2; Schalke 3 Salzburg 1.
Oct 20: Krasnodar 0 Schalke 1; Salzburg 0 Nice 1.
Nov 3: Nice 0 Salzburg 2; Schalke 2 Krasnodar 0.
Nov 24: Krasnodar 1 Salzburg 1; Schalke 2 Nice 0.
Dec 8: Nice 2 Krasnodar 1; Salzburg 2 Schalke 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP I – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Schalke (Q)	6	5	0	1	9	3	15
Krasnodar (Q)	6	2	1	3	8	8	7
Salzburg	6	2	1	3	6	6	7
Nice	6	2	0	4	5	11	6

Group J
Sep 15: PAOK Salonika (Gre) 0 Fiorentina (Ita) 0; Qarabag (Aze) 2 Slovan Liberec (CzR) 2.
Sep 29: Fiorentina 5 Qarabag 1; Slovan Liberec 1 PAOK Salonika 2.
Oct 20: Qarabag 2 PAOK Salonika 0; Slovan Liberec 1 Fiorentina 3.
Nov 3: Fiorentina 3 Slovan Liberec 0; PAOK Salonika 0 Qarabag 1.
Nov 24: Fiorentina 2 PAOK Salonika 3; Slovan Liberec 3 Qarabag 0.
Dec 8: PAOK Salonika 2 Slovan Liberec 0; Qarabag 1 Fiorentina 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP J – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fiorentina (Q)	6	4	1	1	15	6	13
PAOK (Q)	6	3	1	2	7	6	10
Qarabag	6	2	1	3	7	12	7
Slovan Liberec	6	1	1	4	7	12	4

Group K
Sep 15: Internazionale (Ita) 0 Hapoel Beer Sheva (Isr) 2; Southampton (Eng) 3 Sparta Prague (CzR) 0.
Sep 29: Hapoel Beer Sheva 0 Southampton 0; Sparta Prague 3 Internazionale 1.
Oct 20: Hapoel Beer Sheva 0 Sparta Prague 1; Internazionale 1 Southampton 0.
Nov 3: Southampton 2 Internazionale 1; Sparta Prague 2 Hapoel Beer Sheva 0.
Nov 24: Hapoel Beer Sheva 3 Internazionale 2; Sparta Prague 1 Southampton 0.
Dec 8: Internazionale 2 Sparta Prague 1; Southampton 1 Hapoel Beer Sheva 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP K – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sparta P (Q)	6	4	0	2	8	6	12
Beer Sheva (Q)	6	2	2	2	6	6	8
Southampton	6	2	2	2	6	4	8
Internazionale	6	2	0	4	7	11	6

Group L
Sep 15: Osmanlispor (Tur) 2 Steaua Bucharest (Rom) 0; Villarreal (Spa) 2 Zurich (Swi) 1.
Sep 29: Steaua Bucharest 1 Villarreal 1; Zurich 2 Osmanlispor 1.
Oct 20: Osmanlispor 2 Villarreal 2; Steaua Bucharest 1 Zurich 1.
Nov 3: Villarreal 1 Osmanlispor 2; Zurich 0 Steaua Bucharest 0.
Nov 24: Steaua Bucharest 2 Osmanlispor 1; Zurich 1 Villarreal 1.
Dec 8: Osmanlispor 2 Zurich 0; Villarreal 2 Steaua Bucharest 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP L – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Osman'spor (Q)	6	3	1	2	10	7	10
Villarreal (Q)	6	2	3	1	9	8	9
Zurich	6	1	3	2	5	7	6
Steaua	6	1	3	2	5	7	6

● *The top 2 in each group have qualified for the 1st knockout round (last 32)*

1st knockout round (last 32) draw

The 8 3rd-placed teams from the UEFA Champions League group stage (marked with asterisk) enter at this stage
Anderlecht v Zenit St Petersburg
Astra v Genk
Athletic Bilbao v APOEL
AZ Alkmaar v Lyon*
Celta Vigo v Shakhtar Donetsk
Gent v Tottenham Hotspur*
Hapoel Beer Sheva v Besiktas*
Krasnodar v Fenerbahce[1]
Legia Warsaw* v Ajax
Ludogorets* v Copenhagen*
Manchester United v Saint-Etienne[1]
Monchengladbach* v Fiorentina
Olympiakos v Osmanlispor
PAOK Salonika v Schalke
Rostov* v Sparta Prague
Villarreal v Roma
1st legs - Feb16; 2nd legs - Feb 23 ([1]Feb 22)

BELARUS

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BATE (C)	30	22	4	4	73	25	70
Shakhtyor	30	17	8	5	46	20	59
Dinamo Minsk	30	15	10	5	46	28	55
FK Minsk	30	15	8	7	49	24	53
Torpedo Z	30	13	9	8	47	33	48
Vitebsk	30	12	6	12	30	26	42
Isloch	30	11	8	11	33	39	41
Dinamo Brest	30	11	7	12	38	38	40
Gorodeya	30	8	14	8	36	39	38
Slavia	30	9	8	13	33	49	35
Krumkachy	30	9	6	15	24	39	33
Slutsk	30	6	12	12	22	34	30
Neman	30	7	8	15	21	36	29
Naftan	30	7	8	15	25	46	29
Belshina (R)	30	5	10	15	34	45	25
Granit (R)	30	5	10	15	20	56	25

Previous champions (most recent)
2011 BATE
2012 BATE
2013 BATE
2014 BATE
2015 BATE

LITHUANIA

After the 28-round regular season, the top 6 went into the championship stage, carrying forward their regular-season record; the 7th-placed (2nd bottom) team, Utenis, went into the rel/prom play-off, which they won to stay in the top division; the 8th-placed (bottom) team, Kauno Zalgiris, were relegated

2016 – CHAMPIONSHIP STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zalgiris V (C)	33	24	4	5	74	29	76
Trakai	33	20	7	6	55	26	67
Suduva	33	17	7	9	55	41	58
Atlantas	33	16	8	9	42	32	56
Stumbras	33	8	9	16	43	63	33
Lietava	33	8	8	17	35	58	32

Previous champions (most recent)
2010 Ekranas
2011 Ekranas
2012 Ekranas
2013 Zalgiris Vilnius
2014 Zalgiris Vilnius
2015 Zalgiris Vilnius

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Final

1st leg
Nov19
Jeonbuk Motors (SKo) 2 (Leonardo 70, pen 77)
Al Ain (UAE) 1 (Asprilla 63)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 36,158. **Ref:** Al Kaf (Oma)
Jeonbuk: Kwoun Sun-tae - Kim Chang-soo, Choi Chul-soon, Lim Jong-eun, Park Won-jae, Kim Hyung-il, Kim Bo-kyung (Lee Dong-gook 65), Ricardo Lopes, Lee Jae-sung, Leonardo, Kim Shin-wook (Edu 82).
Al Ain: K Eisa - F Fayez, I Ahmed, Salem, M Fayez, Lee, M Abdulrahman (Douglas 78), Barman, Asprilla (Diaky 90+3), O Abdulrahman, Caio.

2nd leg
Nov 26
Al Ain 1 (Lee 34)
Jeonbuk Motors 1 (Han Kyo-won 30)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 23,239. **Ref:** Sato (Jap)
Jeonbuk Motors 3-2 on agg
Al Ain: K Eisa - F Fayez, I Ahmed, Salem (Mosabah 87), M Fayez (M Abdulrahman 71), Lee, Barman, Asprilla, O Abdulrahman, Caio, Douglas (Diaky 78).
Jeonbuk: Kwoun Sun-tae - Choi Chul-soon, Kim Chang-soo, Cho Sung-hwan, Park Won-jae, Kim Hyung-il, Kim Bo-kyung (Edu 90), Ricardo Lopes (Han Kyo-won 5), Lee Jae-sung, Leonardo, Lee Dong-gook (Kim Shin-wook 58).

Previous winners (most recent)
2007 Urawa Reds (Jap)
2008 Gamba Osaka (Jap)
2009 Pohang Steelers (SKo)
2010 Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (SKo)
2011 Al Sadd (Qat)
2012 Ulsan Hyundai (SKo)
2013 Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn)
2014 Western Sydney Wanderers (Aus)
2015 Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn)

JAPAN

2016 – 2ND STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Urawa (Q)[1]	17	13	2	2	35	12	41
Vissel	17	11	2	4	33	18	35
Kawasaki (Q)[1]	17	11	1	5	35	24	34
Gamba	17	10	4	3	31	22	34
Kashiwa	17	9	3	5	32	23	30
Omiya	17	8	6	3	24	18	30
Yokohama	17	7	8	2	32	19	29
Sagan	17	8	5	4	26	22	29
Tokyo	17	9	2	6	23	21	29
Sanfrecce	17	8	2	7	26	22	26
Kashima (Q)[1]	17	6	2	9	24	24	20
Vegalta	17	6	2	9	19	23	20
Ventforet	17	4	4	9	14	27	16
Jubilo	17	2	7	8	16	27	13
Nagoya (R)[2]	17	3	4	10	14	29	13
Albirex	17	4	0	13	14	24	12
Shonan (R)[2]	17	3	2	12	12	29	11
Avispa (R)[2]	17	2	2	13	15	41	8

[1]Urawa Reds qualified directly for the Championship Final as 2nd stage winners and the team with most points in the combined1st/2nd stage table; as1st stage winners, Kashima Antlers were already guaranteed a place in the championship play-offs but went into the semi-final rather than the Final as they had fewer overall points than Urawa Reds; Kawasaki Frontale entered the semi-final as the highest-placed team in the combined1st/2nd stage table apart from the 2 stage winners
[2]Relegation determined by points gained in the combined1st/2nd stage table

Semi-final
Nov 23: Kawasaki Frontale 0 Kashima Antlers 1.

2016 Championship Final
1st leg - Nov 29; 2nd leg - Dec 3
Kashima Antlers v Urawa Reds 0-1, 2-1
(agg 2-2, Kashima Antlers on away goals)

Previous champions (most recent)
2009 Kashima Antlers
2010 Nagoya Grampus
2011 Kashiwa Reysol
2012 Sanfrecce Hiroshima
2013 Sanfrecce Hiroshima
2014 Gamba Osaka
2015 Sanfrecce Hiroshima

TURKMENISTAN

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Altyn Asyr (C)	36	30	5	1	108	19	95
Balkan	36	22	6	8	42	37	72
Energetik	36	20	7	9	54	39	67
Ahal	36	18	8	10	63	42	62
Merw	36	17	6	13	42	36	57
Asgabat FK	36	14	10	12	43	38	52
Kopetdag	36	11	6	19	37	63	39
Sagadam	36	8	8	20	19	38	32
Yedigen	36	6	4	26	22	31	22
Turan (R)	36	2	4	30	18	105	10

UZBEKISTAN

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lokomotiv (C)	30	23	5	2	77	24	74
Bunyodkor	30	18	9	3	46	13	63
Nasaf	30	19	6	5	60	24	63
Buxoro	30	17	7	6	42	27	58
Pakhtakor	30	15	7	8	49	30	52
Qizilqum	30	14	8	8	41	32	50
Metallurg	30	14	7	9	47	34	49
Mash'al	30	11	5	14	35	41	38
Shurtan[1]	30	12	2	16	43	56	35
Sogdiana	30	9	7	14	23	41	34
Neftchi	30	9	4	17	28	43	31
Kokand 1912	30	8	5	17	31	55	29
Olmaliq	30	8	2	20	40	57	26
Obod	30	6	6	18	25	51	24
Navbahor[2]	30	6	5	19	37	66	23
Andijan (R)	30	6	5	19	20	50	23

[1]3pts deducted
[2]Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off

SOUTH AMERICA

SUDAMERICANA CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs - Nov1/2; 2nd legs - Nov 23/24
Cerro Porteno (Par) v Atletico Nacional (Col)
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Atletico Nacional on away gls)
San Lorenzo (Arg) v Chapecoense (Bra)
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Chapecoense on away gls)

Final

Atletico Nacional v Chapecoense
- Chapecoense were declared winners by CONMEBOL after Atletico Nacional suggested the title be awarded to the Brazilian club "for their great loss, and in posthumous homage to the victims" of the plane crash that killed19 Chapecoense players as they were travelling to Medellin to play the1st leg of the Final

Previous winners (most recent)
2012 Sao Paulo (Bra)
2013 Lanus (Arg)
2014 River Plate (Arg)
2015 Santa Fe (Col)

BRAZIL

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeiras (C)	38	24	8	6	62	32	80
Santos	38	22	5	11	59	35	71
Flamengo	38	20	11	7	52	35	71
Atl Mineiro[1]	38	17	11	10	61	53	62
Botafogo	38	17	8	13	43	39	59
Atl Paranaense	38	17	6	15	38	32	57
Corinthians	38	15	10	13	48	42	55
Ponte Preta	38	15	8	15	48	52	53
Gremio	38	14	11	13	41	44	53
Sao Paulo	38	14	10	14	44	36	52
Chapecoense[1]	38	13	13	12	49	56	52
Cruzeiro	38	14	9	15	48	49	51
Fluminense	38	13	11	14	45	45	50
Sport	38	13	8	17	49	55	47
Coritiba	38	11	13	14	41	42	46
Vitoria	38	12	9	17	51	53	45
Internac'al (R)	38	11	10	17	35	41	43
Figueirense (R)	38	8	13	17	30	50	37
Santa Cruz (R)	38	8	7	23	45	69	31
America (R)	38	7	7	24	23	58	28

[1]Chapecoense v Atletico Mineiro not played – given as a 3-0 defeat for both teams

Previous champions (most recent)
2011 Corinthians
2012 Fluminense
2013 Cruzeiro
2014 Cruzeiro
2015 Corinthians

CHILE

2016-17 – APERTURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
U Catolica (C)	15	9	4	2	37	18	31
Dep Iquique	15	8	4	3	28	22	28
U Espanola	15	8	3	4	27	20	27
O'Higgins	15	7	5	3	23	15	26
Colo Colo	15	6	5	4	26	20	23
Palestino	15	6	3	6	25	19	21
Univ de Chile	15	5	6	4	23	22	21
San Luis	15	6	3	6	21	22	21
Antofagasta	15	5	4	6	17	22	19
Huachipato	15	4	6	5	24	24	18
S Wanderers	15	5	3	7	13	20	18
Dep Temuco	15	5	1	9	15	21	16
Cobresal	15	4	4	7	14	21	16
Everton	15	3	6	6	22	28	15
Audax Italiano	15	4	3	8	17	28	15
U Concepcion	15	4	2	9	15	25	14

Previous champions (most recent)

2013-14	ap	O'Higgins
	cl	Colo Colo
2014-15	ap	Universidad de Chile
	cl	Cobresal
2015-16	ap	Colo Colo
	cl	Universidad Catolica

URUGUAY

2016 – TRANSITIONAL – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional (C)	15	11	1	3	27	12	34
Wanderers	15	8	5	2	22	14	29
Danubio	15	9	2	4	24	19	29
Defensor	15	7	4	4	22	15	25
Liverpool	15	6	6	3	16	13	24
Boston River	15	5	7	3	19	11	22
Cerro	15	6	4	5	16	15	22
Racing	15	5	5	5	24	26	20
Fenix	15	5	4	6	19	19	19
River Plate	15	5	3	7	18	28	18
Juventud	15	4	5	6	9	11	17
Sud America	15	5	2	8	17	20	17
Rampla Jnrs	15	4	5	6	9	16	17
Penarol	15	4	3	8	17	20	15
Plaza Colonia	15	2	6	7	16	24	12
Villa Espanola	15	1	4	10	14	26	7

Previous champions (most recent)

2010-11	Nacional
2011-12	Nacional
2012-13	Penarol
2013-14	Danubio
2014-15	Nacional
2015-16	Penarol

VENEZUELA

2016 Clausura Final

1st leg - Nov 27; 2nd leg - Nov 30
Zulia v Deportivo Tachira
2-0, 0-2 (agg 2-2, Zulia 7-6 on pens)

Overall 2016 Championship Final

(apertura winners Zamora v clausura winners Zulia)
1st leg - Dec 4; 2nd leg - Dec11
Zamora v Zulia 2-1, 2-1 (agg 4-2)

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Dallas (USA) v Arabe Unido (Pan)
New York Red Bulls (USA)
v Vancouver Whitecaps (Can)
Saprissa (CR) v Pachuca (Mex)
Tigres UANL (Mex) v Pumas UNAM (Mex)
1st legs - Feb 21-23; 2nd legs - Feb 28-Mar 2

GRENADA

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paradise (C)	18	13	5	0	48	23	44
Hard Rock	18	12	3	3	43	19	39
St John's	18	9	6	3	40	29	33
Mount Rich	18	7	6	5	38	30	27
Hurricane	18	6	6	6	24	24	24
QPR	18	4	8	6	35	33	20
Chantimelle	18	4	5	9	26	38	17
Fontenoy Utd	18	4	4	10	31	45	16
Boca Jnrs (R)	18	2	7	9	26	42	13
Gouyave (R)	18	3	2	13	19	47	11

NICARAGUA

The top 4 from the18-round regular season formed the championship group; no regular-season record carried forward

2016-17 – APERTURA: CHAMP'SHIP GP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Esteli (C)	6	3	3	0	6	2	12
Walter Ferretti	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
Diriangen	6	2	1	3	5	9	7
UNAN Managua	6	0	2	4	5	9	2

PANAMA

2016-17 Apertura Final

Dec 4: Plaza Amador 0 Arabe Unido 2.

UNITED STATES

2016 – REGULAR: EASTERN CONFERENCE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
NY RB (Q)	34	16	9	9	61	44	57
NY City (Q)	34	15	9	10	62	57	54
Toronto (Q)	34	14	11	9	51	39	53
DC United (Q)	34	11	13	10	53	47	46
Montreal (Q)	34	11	12	11	49	53	45
Philad'phia (Q)	34	11	9	14	52	55	42
New England	34	11	9	14	44	54	42
Orlando	34	9	14	11	55	60	41
Columbus	34	8	12	14	50	58	36
Chicago	34	7	10	17	42	58	31

2016 – REGULAR: WESTERN CONFERENCE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dallas (Q)	34	17	9	8	50	40	60
Colorado (Q)	34	15	13	6	39	32	58
Los Angeles (Q)	34	12	16	6	54	39	52
Seattle (Q)	34	14	6	14	44	43	48
Kansas City (Q)	34	13	8	13	42	41	47
Salt Lake (Q)	34	12	10	12	44	46	46
Portland	34	12	8	14	48	53	44
Vancouver	34	10	9	15	45	52	39
San Jose	34	8	14	12	32	40	38
Houston	34	7	13	14	39	45	34

The top 6 in both conferences qualified for the championship play-offs, the teams placed 3rd to 6th going into the1st round, the top 2 directly into the quarter-finals (conference semi-finals)

1st round

Oct 26: Los Angeles Galaxy 3 Real Salt Lake 1; Toronto 3 Philadelphia Union 1.
Oct 27: DC United 2 Montreal Impact 4; Seattle Sounders 1 Sporting Kansas City 0.

Quarter-finals (conference semi-finals)

1st legs - Oct 30; 2nd legs - Nov 6
Los Angeles Galaxy v Colorado Rapids
1-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 1-1, Colorado 3-1 on pens)
Montreal Impact v New York Red Bulls
1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1)
Seattle Sounders v Dallas 3-0, 1-2 (agg 4-2)
Toronto v New York City 2-0, 5-0 (agg 7-0)

Semi-finals (conference finals)

1st legs - Nov 22; 2nd legs - Nov 27/30
Montreal Impact v Toronto
3-2, 2-5 (aet) (agg 5-7)
Seattle Sounders v Colorado Rapids
2-1, 1-0 (agg 3-1)

2016 Championship Final (MLS Cup)

Dec 10: Toronto 0 Seattle Sounders 0 (aet, Seattle Sounders 5-4 on pens).

Previous champions (most recent)

2010	Colorado Rapids
2011	Los Angeles Galaxy
2012	Los Angeles Galaxy
2013	Sporting Kansas City
2014	Los Angeles Galaxy
2015	Portland Timbers

AFRICA

COMOROS

Overall championship for the winners of the 3 regional leagues

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ngaya (C)	4	2	2	0	6	3	8
Fomboni	3	1	1	1	5	2	4
Steal Nouvel	3	0	1	2	2	8	1

Fomboni v Steal Nouvel not played

MADAGASCAR

The top 2 from both the 2nd stage groups formed the championship group; no regular-season record carried forward

2016 – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CNaPS (C)	6	5	0	1	11	4	15
Elgeco	6	3	2	1	8	7	11
SOM-Fosa	6	0	3	3	7	10	3
Zanak'ala	6	0	3	3	4	9	3

ZAMBIA

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zanaco (C)	34	25	6	3	71	16	81
Zesco United	34	21	9	4	56	18	72
Nkana	34	21	7	6	57	30	70
Power Dy'mos	34	18	7	9	47	29	61
Grn Buffaloes	34	15	8	11	38	32	53
Kabwe Wa'rs	34	13	11	10	33	28	50
Red Arrows	34	11	13	10	27	30	46
Nkwazi	34	10	15	9	40	39	45
Forest Rangers	34	12	7	15	26	33	43
Napsa Stars	34	10	12	12	28	30	42
Mufulira Wdrs	34	7	18	9	26	33	39
Nchanga Rgrs	34	10	9	15	28	36	39
Green Eagles	34	9	11	14	26	30	38
L'na Radiants	34	9	11	14	23	31	38
L Dynamos (R)	34	9	9	16	28	50	36
N Leopards (R)	34	8	11	15	24	39	35
L Tigers (R)	34	5	10	19	18	49	25
Mufulira B (R)	34	0	12	22	9	52	12

ZIMBABWE

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CAPS Utd (C)	30	18	9	3	42	21	63
FC Platinum	30	17	10	3	38	15	61
Highlanders	30	17	5	8	41	24	56
Chicken Inn	30	13	8	9	31	20	47
Dynamos	30	12	10	8	29	24	46
ZPC Kariba	30	11	12	7	23	21	45
Ngezi Platinum	30	11	8	11	29	27	41
Bulawayo City	30	11	8	11	27	27	41
Harare City	30	11	6	13	32	29	39
How Mine	30	9	12	9	27	25	39
Triangle Utd	30	10	8	12	27	32	38
Hwange	30	9	9	12	24	35	36
Chapungu (R)	30	7	11	12	22	27	32
Tsholotsho (R)	30	7	5	18	23	38	26
Mutare C[1] (R)	30	7	8	15	25	44	26
Border Strk (R)	30	4	3	23	10	41	15

[1] 3pts deducted for fielding an ineligible player

OCEANIA

AMERICAN SAMOA

The top 5 after the 9-round regular season formed the championship group; no regular-season record carried forward

2016 – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pago Youth (C)	4	4	0	0	13	1	12
Utulei Youth	4	2	0	2	7	4	6
Lion Heart	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Tafuna Jets	4	1	1	2	3	9	4
Vaiala Tongan	4	0	2	2	1	9	2

COOK ISLANDS

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Puaikura (C)	12	10	2	0	50	10	32
Tupapa	12	7	1	4	32	20	22
Takuvaine	12	6	4	2	34	24	22
Nikao Sok'tak	12	5	5	2	25	13	20
Avatiu	12	4	2	6	18	38	14
Titikaveka	12	1	1	10	21	48	4
Matavera	12	1	1	10	7	34	4

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage
(EL) = enter Europa League

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World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

JULY 26, 1966, ENGLAND: WORLD CUP SEMI-FINAL

England 2 Portugal 1

Host nation shackle the great Eusebio to claim their place in the 1966 World Cup Final

Jittery... Roger Hunt puts Portugal keeper Jose Pereira under pressure

England, the host nation, and Portugal, with the star of the tournament in Eusebio, met at Wembley Stadium in what was a first-ever appearance in a World Cup semi-final for both countries.

Writing in the September 1966 edition of *World Soccer*, Stuart Shaw began: "After the hilarity of the Argentine match [against England in the quarter-final] and the high jinks Portugal had had with North Korea, an interesting struggle was promised."

Eusebio was key to Portugal's performance, but England midfielder Nobby Stiles shackled him throughout the game and nullified his effectiveness.

At the other end of the pitch, England had space to play some wonderful football.

Shaw wrote: "Portugal were as uncertain in defence as could be imagined, with a jittery goalkeeper and a defensive wall which consisted of four men on the edge of the penalty area who marked any opponent – if he got near enough."

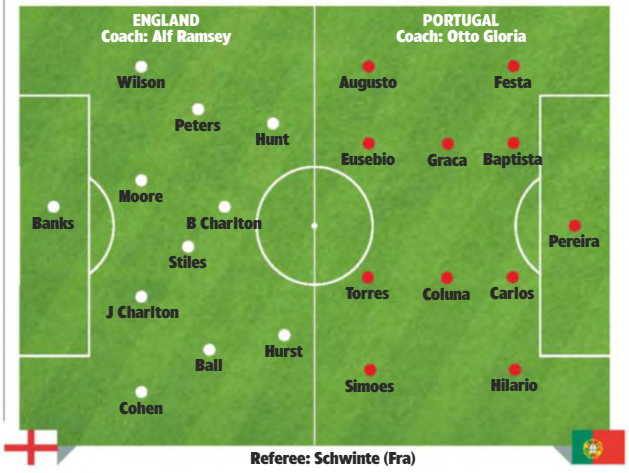
Commenting that "Bobby Charlton revelled in such freedom", the England number nine opened the scoring on the half hour. But Portugal fought back and went to the half-time break on the back of two good efforts from Eusebio.

As the second half progressed, Portugal pushed men forward and that worked to England's advantage, with a counter-attack leading to Charlton's second goal.

Portugal reduced the arrears through a Eusebio penalty, and in a frantic finale play passed from one end to the other as, firstly, Charlton had a 25-yard shot smothered by Jose Pereira in the Portugal goal, and then Mario Coluna was thwarted by England keeper Gordon Banks.

At the end of the game, Eusebio left the pitch in tears, while England strode off triumphantly to prepare for the Final, four days later, in which they would beat West Germany 4-2 in extra time. WS

Tears...Eusebio leaves the Wembley pitch



Referee: Schwinte (Fra)

KEY MOMENTS

In front...Bobby Charlton (centre) celebrates

14min After Portugal goalkeeper Jose Pereira drops the ball, Jack Charlton's effort is blocked and Geoff Hurst's shot is saved at the near post.

26min Antonio Simoes plays the ball to Eusebio, whose right-foot shot from outside the area is turned away for a corner by Gordon Banks.

30min A long pass by Ray Wilson finds Roger Hunt, whose effort on goal is blocked by Pereira. The ball falls to Bobby Charlton, who fires home. **1-0**

37min Jack Charlton's clearance falls to Eusebio, whose volley from 12 yards is pushed to safety by Banks.

41min Eusebio wins the ball after a poor clearance by Banks and beats George Cohen, but his shot flies over.

73min Alan Ball heads Moore's pass into the path of Hurst, who in turn finds an on-rushing Bobby Charlton, but his right-foot shot clears the bar.

80min Hurst passes to Bobby Charlton, who scores from the edge of the area. **2-0**

82min Jose Torres' header brushes the arm of Jack Charlton. Eusebio scores the penalty. **2-1**

Second...Charlton

87min Mario Coluna's header bounces up and strikes Moore's hand, but the referee is unmoved.

90min A brilliant run and pass by Eusebio finds Coluna, whose right-foot shot is tipped over by Banks.

Spot on...Eusebio beats Gordon Banks

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